THE
RAMBLES OF A DOMIN

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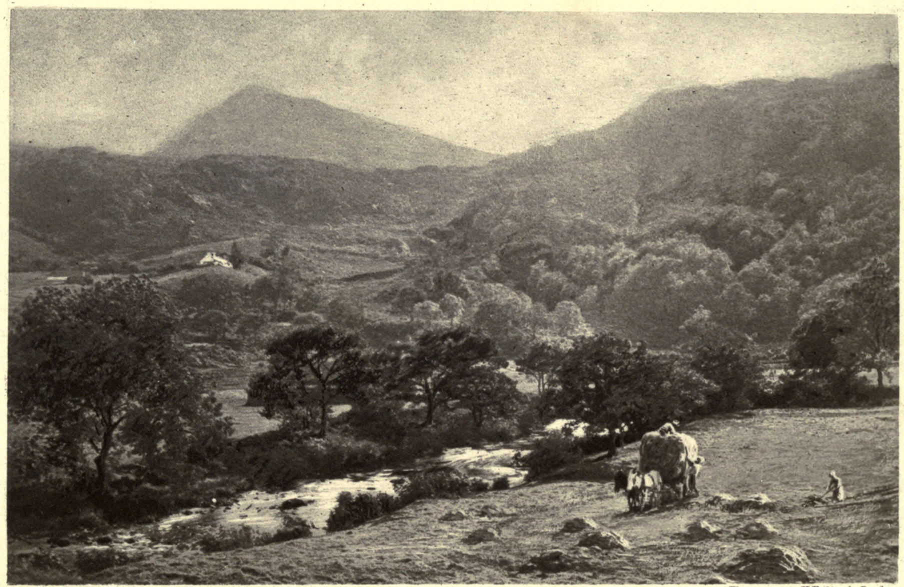
THE RAMBLES OF A DOMINIE



Photogravure H. Riffarth. Berlin

MOEL SIABOD.
NORTH WALES.

THE RAMBLES
OF A DOMINIE

BY

FRANCIS A. KNIGHT

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"BY LEAFY WAYS," "IDYLLS OF THE FIELD," &c.

With Illustrations by E. T. Compton

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TO THE
OLD BOYS
WHO HAVE SHARED AND BRIGHTENED
THESE
RAMBLES
AMONG THE MENDIPS, ON DARTMOOR,
AND IN BAVARIA,
THIS BOOK
Is Affectionately Dedicated
BY THEIR OLD
DOMINIE

> *"—to me ye never will grow old,*
> *But live for ever young in my remembrance.*
>
> *Never grow old, nor change, nor pass away!*
> *Your youthful voices will flow on for ever;*
> *When Life grows bare and tarnished with decay,*
> *As through a leafless landscape flows a river."*

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J. A. Knight

RAMBLES OF A DOMINIE

AN OLD STORY

> "Holding the cunning-warded keys
> To all the woodcraft mysteries;
> Himself to Nature's heart so near
> That all her voices in his ear
> Of bird or beast had meanings clear."
>
> WHITTIER.

THE expression "Eyes and No Eyes" has passed into a proverb. It is a phrase used probably by thousands who never read the original story—perhaps never even saw the "Evenings at Home," a book that made its mark a century ago, a book with which at least our fathers were familiar; though there are many who have at least a general idea of it, and not a few who well remember how the two schoolboys spent their holiday. How they set off together, but as one of them "lagged behind in the lane," the other went on without him; then how the first came in complaining of the dulness of his walk and the tediousness of his companion; regretted the absence of people, and had "rather by half have gone along the turnpike road;" and then how the other boy, the one who had loitered by the way, came back, having gone over just the same ground, brimful of enthusiasm over the birds, the flowers, the insects he had met with in his ramble, and finally produced his "handkerchief full of curiosities." The other admitted that he too "saw some of these things, but did not take particular notice of them." He "did not care about them."

It is a good story. But it is more than a story. And it is as true to-day as when, a hundred years ago, it was first given to the world. It is just what has been happening since on every day in the year. It is precisely what would happen now if a man town-born and bred were to set out for a stroll in the country with a companion whose eyes and ears had, by long and patient study in the open air, grown not only familiar, but, as it were, unconsciously conscious of every sight and sound in all the landscape round him.

But the naturalist, like the poet, is born, not made. Much may undoubtedly be done by training, but the keen observer is, first of all, a lover of Nature for her own sake. He may not have any very deep acquaintance with scientific text-books. He might betray, and very likely would, an ignorance of geographical distribution, of types, of scientific nomenclature in which a South Kensington student could put him to the blush in five minutes. But his mastery of woodcraft, his knowledge of the haunts of nature, has been gained by days and nights of waiting in the fields and lanes, by solitary vigil in the twilight of the woods, by good-fellowship with all the creatures of the wild. The arm-chair critic, ever anxious, after the manner of his kind, to classify and label, complacently sets down each naturalist as the follower of a school. Yes, but it is the great school in which their lives are spent: a school not of men or printed books; a school in which "Nature, the dear old nurse," spreads wide before the eyes of loving learners pages of "the manuscript of God."

It is no doubt hard for an outsider—a man whose opportunities or tastes have never made him free of Nature's vast and wandering realm—to realise how full of life are woods and fields and country lanes. The picture of a woodland walk seems to him too full of figures, exaggerated, unreal.

A man who never from a bivouac among the mountains saw the splendour of an Alpine dawn, who never from his lonely hut has watched the sun go down behind the mountain wall and leave the mighty ramparts glowing with the fire of heaven, sees an Alpine landscape painted as the artist saw it, and coolly writes that the tints are overdone, the colouring impossible.

So is it in descriptions of Nature. "A realist might find something suspicious," says another critic on the hearth, "in the crowd of figures with which the writer peoples all his woods and fields," and cannot read between the lines that the pictures were painted on the spot, and that every figure was copied from the life.

Another man reads a sketch of a ramble in the woods. His soul is stirred by the description of what are spoken of as familiar sights and sounds. He recognises the spot—the background of the picture. Why, these things are at his very door, and he has not seen them. He gets his hat and stick, he whistles to his dog, and, with the paper in his hand, he hurries up the well-known path among the trees. A hundred times already has he passed that way, but now he will see things with quite different eyes. How strange that he never saw a squirrel or a weasel, a gold-crest or a woodpecker.

Full of hope and expectation he clatters up the stony track, startling a voluble blackbird from the bush hard by, and sending him headlong through the wood repeating his loud signal of alarm. And now he is at the top of the path, having stopped once or twice to call up the dog, who, in the full enjoyment of the chase, is scattering in confusion all the inhabitants of the underwood. "Yes, this is the spot; there is the old tree with the bark torn away by the woodpecker;" and elated with his success in having really got upon the track, he cuts away with his stick a spray or two of briar with a crack that might be heard a hundred yards. A squirrel sitting quiet at his dinner on the level fir-bough overhead drops his half-gnawed cone and crouches behind the shelter of the branch. A woodpecker who was digging for larvæ in an old stump farther on retreats behind his tree and watches motionless. A troop of tits and gold-crests scatter from the neighbouring tree-tops, and a complacent smack on the newspaper is answered by a watchful wren, whose shrill rattle sets every feathered neighbour on the alert.

Yes, this is the place; but where are the birds? He can see no squirrel racing over the branches. Woodpeckers? Why, there's not a bird in the whole place. Snakes? That writer was a humbug. Impatiently he kicked away a loose stone lying in the path, crumpled up the offending newspaper, and clattered homeward down the path again. And he said—O well, never mind what he said; but he came back wrathful, with the fixed conviction that the whole thing was a fraud, evolved from the depths of some writer's consciousness by the aid of a too fertile imagination.

And yet, had he but known it, that sketch was written on that very path by a man who, through those very woods, stole softly and alone; whose feet were hushed on green and mossy ways; who left at home the bright-eyed terrier who begged so hard to be allowed to follow—knowing well the happy hunting grounds her master loved to haunt. No sound of footsteps then upon the rocky path disturbed the squirrel at his feast. He paused, indeed, a moment, to peer with bright black eyes down through the leafy arches, but he made no sign of flight. The gold-crests frolicked in the swaying boughs unconscious of the passing steps beneath. A rabbit cantering lightly down the slight path among the bushes came face to face with a strange figure; stopped, and looked up with big dark eyes; was doubtful, and jogged back a yard or two; then came on again, and seeing no movement, passed contentedly, without a thought of danger.

As for snakes, the oldest and most cautious hand knows well how hard it is to get a good sight of the long brown figure basking on the bank, and that often the first sign of its presence is its rustle in the bushes as it glides away.

It is marvellous, too, how slowly grow upon the sense of hearing, not merely the faint cries of bat and shrew, but the call of the curlew, the drone of the nightjar, even the chatter of a magpie; while to the naturalist, the notes of birds betray them as certainly as their shape, their attitude, or the colour of their plumage.

Nor is it alone the city man who finds the country dull and barren. There is many a dweller among green fields of whom it could not even truthfully be said that

> "A primrose by a river's brim
> A yellow primrose was to him,"

—he does not even see the primrose.

How many a time has he crossed the wooden bridge that spans the loitering river. He may, indeed, have paused to watch the leap of a trout or the dip of a swallow. But did he catch the white flicker of the sandpiper that took wing far up the stream? Did he see the brown water-rat that watched him from the shore, holding up in dainty paws the blade of sedge he was nibbling for his supper? The dragon-fly went past without a glance from him: he had no eyes for the tiny beetles that in mazy dances spun upon the glassy surface. A wedge of wild duck overhead went by unseen. The slow wings of the heron drifting up the stream passed over him unnoticed. A troop of curlews flying to the moorland called softly to each other in their sweet wild way, but their voices fell upon unheeding ears. Like "No Eyes" in the story, he may have seen some of these things, but "did not take particular notice of them." He "did not care about them." There is many a man who knows his parish well, whose days are passed among sweet country sights and sounds, to whom, lacking the training of the eye and ear, the voice of Nature still remains an alien tongue.

JACK SPARROW

> "You call them thieves and pillagers; but know
> They are the wingèd wardens of your farms,
> Who from the cornfields drive the insidious foe,
> And from your harvests keep a hundred harms."
>
> LONGFELLOW.

On the threshold of the winter, when the sands of the old year are sinking, and days are darkening in the drear December, we miss more than ever the presence of the birds. But although the open country is all silent, and lane and copse have long been emptied of their music, in the heart of the great city there is less of change. Toilers of Babylon, in crowded court and dingy attic, to whom a green field is a half-forgotten memory, and the cuckoo's cry a sound unknown, are no sharers in the free life of the country, know nothing of its ebb and flow.

One bird only braves with them the fog, the smoke, the squalor of the city. No pinch of poverty drives his hardy clan to forage in the fields. The sparrow lingers by the flesh-pots all the winter through.

He is a bird familiar indeed to all. But his familiarity has nothing in common with the fearless confidence of the robin, who helps the gardener at his work, and who in hard days of winter joins the household at their meals. Nor is it that of the swallow, who, timid as she is, will almost brush you with her purple wings as you stand to watch her floating to her nest among the rafters.

The daring of the sparrow is the evidence of an intellect sharpened by bitter persecution; his is a boldness born of long familiarity with danger. Always on guard against the prowling cat, constantly on the look-out for flying missiles, mistrustful even of the crumbs that kind hands scatter on the grass, ever he holds himself warily aloof. Gladly we minister to the wants of the suppliant robin. We love to watch the titmouse swinging on a bone. But to the sparrow scant welcome is accorded; good words for him are rarely spoken. His impudent air, the doubtful character of his language—especially in the heat of argument or the dust of conflict—his undeniable acts of pillage weigh heavier in the popular regard than all his faithful service in the field.

He has no lack of handsome kinsmen. The goldfinch, for all his smart red cap and the dainty fan of yellow in his wing, is a connection not remote. The chaffinch is his near ally; the bullfinch, too, is numbered with his clan. But of these the sparrow is the poor relation. There is no gay colour in his coat, no note of music on his tongue.

A wide difference there is, however, between the sparrow of the country and the sparrow of the town; between the dingy bird that nestles in the niches of St. Paul's and the smart cousin roosting in the fragrant cleanness of the hayrick. The city sparrow, clad in a dull garb suggestive of his smoky haunts, is a bold-hearted bird, in his element amid the turmoil of the street, cool and collected among the roar of traffic, lingering under the very feet of the horses. He makes under smoky eaves a grimy nest, and finds among blackened roofs a field with which his colour harmonises well. His notes are sharp and scurrilous, savouring of profanity and the city arab.

A very different figure is the country cousin, who, with plumage all untarnished, swings on the laburnum bough, or, perched on the brown thatch of the barn, gossips drowsily with his neighbours in the summer twilight. Plain to see is the patch of black upon his throat; unsullied the white bar across his wing. Undimmed with dust is the grey tinge of his crown; unsoiled with soot the chestnut of his glossy feathers.

But, whether of the town or country, the sparrow is a sparrow still. Perhaps there is no bird with a character so strongly marked. No bird more resolutely holds its own. Perhaps there is none who works with more untiring zeal; no bird certainly gets less credit for his pains. His good deeds are prompted, it is true, less by love than by necessity. In the struggle for existence he gets his dinner where he can, and it is all the same to him if his food is found among the insects that attack the crop, or among the ripening grain itself; if the first course should be wire-worm and the second wheat.

The occasional addition of a second name is a distinction which the sparrow shares with many birds. The redbreast is always Robin. We are so accustomed to Tom tit, Mag pie, Jack daw, that we forget that these birds were differently christened. We associate with Robin the name of Jenny wren. The countryman is familiar with Peggy whitethroat; and, perhaps in tribute to its graceful air and the tasteful arrangement of its colouring, the redstart is Jenny, Fanny, Bessie, or Katie, according to the fancy of the particular district. Several plain-coloured birds are called Isaac—a curious epithet, explained by a passage in Chaucer, where the hedge-sparrow is called heysugge. Sally picker is a name given in Ireland to several small warblers. Here Sally is clearly a corruption of sallow, a willow-tree.

The sparrow's ancient title of Philip has long been dropped. The estimation in which he is commonly held precludes altogether the use of any real pet word for him. There are few allusions to him in the poets. No pleasant legend clings about his name. In his busy life there would have been no room for the kind offices performed by pitying robins for the Babes in the Wood. It is to be feared that his bold unhesitating answer to the question, "Who killed Cock Robin?" is more in keeping with his character.

The nests of birds are for the most part occupied only in the spring time. The structure on which such care and skill were lavished is tenanted for a few short weeks; then, at the end of a summer, it is abandoned, and in a brief space all the material of moss and hair and feathers, gleaned with patient toil and arranged with matchless art, is scattered to the winds. But the home of the sparrow is more to him than a nursery or a temporary resting-place. In many cases it serves as a shelter all the year, and the thick layers of feathers which form its defence against the winter's cold are as marked a feature in its plan as the palisade of thorns with which the magpie guards his own against attack.

It would be hard to find a spot where the bold sparrow would not dare to make his nest. From a hole in the beam of a colliery engine beating twenty strokes a minute, to the mouth of the lion on the vanished Northumberland House; from a crease in the canvas of a coasting smack to the muzzle of an abandoned gun, all sorts of places in their time have served his turn.

But best of all perhaps he loves the snug shelter of the eaves, hiding his nest under the tiling, in a rain-water pipe, or in the tunnel which he or his ancestors have hollowed in the ancient thatch. He has a special weakness for seizing on his neighbour's house, and many a pair of swallows and of martins has he driven from their homestead. He in his turn is by no means unfamiliar with the bitterness of eviction when swift or starling has taken a fancy to his nest. Several times the daring bird has been known to take up its quarters among the material of an occupied magpie's nest, and there is a case on record of its building among the sticks of the very eyrie of an eagle.

The sparrow is, more even than the robin, a follower of man. But unlike the nettle, which, although growing only where man has been, continues to flourish long after the dwelling has fallen into ruin, and the garden has gone back into the wilderness, the sparrow deserts at once the spot from which man's presence is withdrawn. In Siberia, where its appearance is comparatively recent, it has accompanied the Russian advance along the military roads, but even then is said to favour those lands alone where crops of corn are raised.

The question of the work and wages of this industrious bird has been ably argued from both sides. Again and again has its account of service and ill deeds been made out and balanced; and although the damage done by it, to some crops at least, is very great, there can be no doubt that the sparrow is one of the farmer's most valuable retainers, an ally altogether indispensable to the safety of his harvest. The foes which lie in wait for all young birds amply suffice to keep their numbers down, without resorting to the miserable machinery of the sparrow club.

The hen sparrow lays five or six eggs. Two broods there generally are, often three, sometimes even four. Did eighteen young birds each year survive the complaints of childhood, escape the cat and crow, and reach the age of maturity without mishap, and should they and their descendants all be living at the end of ten years, the family of a single pair would number exactly two thousand millions—a community which would, if they had the chance, exhaust the entire wheat harvest of the British Islands in rather less than twelve months.

But, as a matter of fact, no such increase is possible. The vast majority of nestlings die from cold and wet and the attacks of bird and beast before the end even of their first season, and the bird population of any district hardly varies in amount from year to year.

It has been well urged in defence of the sparrow that the time during which the grain is open to attack is but brief, while the work of ridding the land of noxious insects is continued all the year. Careful calculations have been made as to the work done by this indefatigable bird in the destruction of grubs and wire-worms and other foes of the farmer. During the breeding season a pair of sparrows will carry to their young as many as forty thousand caterpillars, besides an untold quantity of other forms of insect life.

In the United States, where the vast flocks of sparrows were long regarded with disfavour, the farmer is beginning now to welcome them as stout allies; to see in their appearing the safety of his crops. Those who grudge to their feathered labourers their dole of corn, and wish to do without them, may remember how the men of Killingworth in conclave met,

> "——shook their heads, and doomed with dreadful words
> To swift destruction the whole race of birds."

They bought their experience dear:

> "The summer came, and all the birds were dead,
> The days were like hot coals; the very ground

Was burned to ashes; in the orchards fed
  Myriads of caterpillars, and around
The cultivated fields and garden beds
  Hosts of devouring insects crawled, and found
No foe to check their march, till they had made
The land a desert without leaf or shade."

THE KINGFISHER'S HAUNTS

PERHAPS it is the fatal gift of beauty which prevents the kingfisher from being common anywhere. Certainly no bird is more ruthlessly slaughtered by any man who has a chance of shooting him, either as a proof of skill in marksmanship, or for the sake of the dried, distorted, and expressionless skin generally spoken of as "a stuffed *bird*."

But there is many a quiet reach on the broad river, many a secluded nook along the stream, where still he holds his own. How often, in the stillness of a summer morning, when the mist was lying on the water, has the light beat of oar blades broken suddenly the silence of some sanctuary among the willows! And then, as the startled wild-duck struggled noisily up out of the reeds, as the gaunt heron spread his great wings for flight, the kingfisher, with straight and rapid course, flashed along the shore, the luminous blue of his bright plumage showing on the water like a flame. How often, too, the fisherman has started at the passing vision of those swift and splendid wings!

It is no marvel that a bird so beautiful should have been, in all ages, theme for myth and folk-lore. Who does not remember how Halcyone, the sea-god's daughter, saw her husband's lifeless figure laid upon the shore, and threw herself despairing in the waves? And how the gods, in pity, changed her mate and her to birds of rare plume, whose dress of green and red and azure has outlasted even "the immortals"?

Hardly less strange is Pliny's story, that, in the dead of winter, the halcyon built her nest upon the sea, and that by her father's gift the waves were quiet while she brooded on her eggs.

The kingfisher was clearly not common even in Pliny's time. "This very bird so notable," he says, according to that version by Holland, whose quaint diction is just in keeping with the old-world story, "is little bigger than a sparrow; for the more part of her pennage blew, intermingled yet among with white and purple feathers, having a thin, small neck and long withal. It is a very great chance to see one of these hálcycons. They haunt rivers, and sing among the flags and reeds."

Giraldus, the learned Welshman who wrote the "Topography of Ireland," records the legend current in his time, that a dead kingfisher, if kept from damp, would not decay, and if hung up by the beak would renew its feathers year by year.

Aldrovandus, however, who took for gospel all that was told him in the course of his travels, has a story surpassing even this. He tells us that a kingfisher's skin suspended in the air will point without fail to the quarter whence the wind was blowing. This is what is meant in "Lear," when the outspoken Earl of Kent talks of the smiling rogues who—

> "—— turn their halcyon beaks
> With every gale and vary of their masters."

Marlowe, too, in "The Jew of Malta," asks, "Into what corner peers my halcyon's bill?" In a book on birds, published in this century, the writer speaks of having seen in this country a dead kingfisher, which its owner declared never failed to turn its beak to the right point of the compass.

No less full of marvels are the accounts of the halcyon's nest given by the old writers. And although no modern writer has been found to copy without question, as Montaigne did, the fables of Pliny and Plutarch, some uncertainty has, until quite recent times, obscured the life history of this well-known bird. In Goldsmith we read that the nest is made of willow-down. Aldrovandus describes it as lined with flowers of water plants.

The Halcyon Days of the old legend were in the winter-time; but it is well on in the summer generally when the modern kingfisher lays her eggs. She digs with her beak a hole three or four inches in diameter, and varying in length from two to four feet, in the bank of a stream near her haunt, or among the willow roots that the river has laid bare. Sometimes, however, she chooses a spot a long way from the water.

There still seems some difference of opinion as to the nest itself. One high authority describes it as made of fish-bones "apparently worked by the bird's movements as she sits, into the shape of a cup; and . . . . they generally cohere so as to become a very pretty nest, more than an inch deep and quite smooth within." This is the account in Yarrell; and Montagu, writing early in the century, uses much the same terms.

But there is a nest in the British Museum, taken from a deep hole in a bank on the Thames, which consists of a loose layer of fish-bones half an inch thick, strewn on the earth of the burrow without any sign of definite arrangement.

Just such a nest as this was found last summer close to the sea, in a bank of hard sand not more than fifteen feet above the shingle that runs all along the tide-mark. The nearest fresh water is a rhine—as the country people call it—three hundred yards away, with banks too low for the most part to afford a safe retreat.

It is a quiet spot the halcyons have chosen—one of those rare places haunted still even by the peregrine and the raven. On a rocky brow near by, among the mantling ivy, the falcons reared their brood only last year. Under the overhanging steep a little farther on a raven was shot upon her eggs. It was a cruel fate; but the lives of the young turkeys at yonder farm under the hill would have been worth but few weeks' purchase had the bold bandits reared their brood in safety. The widower raven soon found another mate; but if they have built another nest, it has so far happily escaped discovery.

The crannies of the cliff over the kingfisher's nest are in the early summer clamorous with troops of daws. Here the grey rock-dove breeds. Here, too, each year, more than one brood of fierce young kestrels dare that plunge over the rocky threshold which makes them free of the empire of the air.

Sheldrakes, handsomest of sea-fowl, breed by scores in the rabbit burrows among the bushes just over the verge of the cliff, and, coming out at nightfall, forage far and wide along the shore. The duck makes no nest; but when she has laid her dozen or more of great cream-coloured eggs on the bare sand of her burrow she covers them with down, which, like the eider, she has taken from her breast.

Such are the fellow-tenants of the halcyon's haunt. In her hunting-ground among the moorland ditches—where you may chance at times to see her hovering like a hawk over the water—she has for neighbours the sedge-warbler and the reed-sparrow; she knows well by sight her brother anglers, the handsome oyster-catcher and the tall, grey heron.

But her home is not by the water. It is here in this steep wall of sand that she has her dwelling. In the barren soil about her threshold, the bugloss and the yellow poppy bloom. Near by the henbane hangs its pallid bells. White tufts of campion, purple seapink, golden samphire, light the dark ledges of the cliffs. In sheltered hollows of the down the evening primrose spreads its yellow flowers; and on rocky slopes and ridges linger still a few fragile blossoms of the rare white cistus, that in the spring-time was scattered all along the hillside like a touch of snow.

The hole which the birds have cut, in sand that has hardened almost into rock, is in this case not more than eighteen inches deep, and measures barely four inches in diameter. It slopes slightly upward, as if to keep out the rain, and expands at the end into a sort of chamber perhaps six inches across. The whole floor is strewn with dry shells of shrimps, and bones of tiny fishes. There is nothing in the least suggestive of a nest. The remains are no thicker in one place than another, but are scattered in a thin layer from end to end. On the loose fragments lay, when first the nest was found, five exquisite eggs.

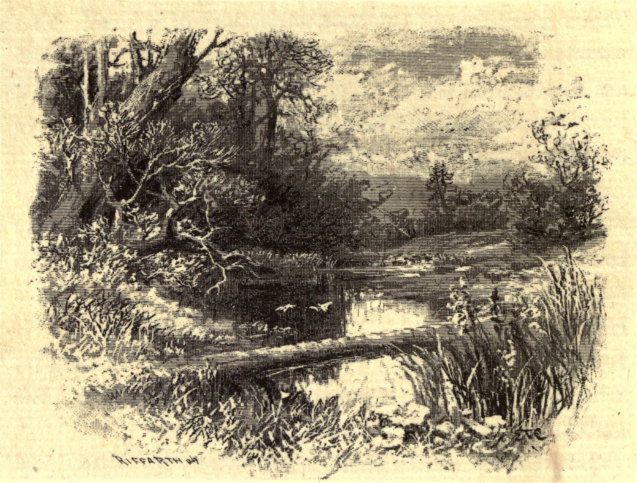
The kingfisher itself loses much of its beauty with its life. After death its marvellous colouring begins rapidly to fade. In the hands of the average bird-stuffer the soft roundness of the feathering, on the head especially, is crushed and marred. But the egg, which, when it is fresh, glows like a very opal, is robbed of all its charm when the yolk which showed its rich colour through the smooth white shell is once withdrawn.

But this sea-beaten shore is not by any means an ideal halcyon's haunt. Let us rather follow the path that leads through the meadows past the mill—a path now hardly seen among the long grass, still unmown—and, under grey old willows, wander with the wandering brook.

A creek that drains into the little river, crossed by a single unhewn log, is filled to the very brim with sedges and burr-reed and tall water plantain. Red flowers of willow-herb look, over plumes of mare's tail, down into quiet pools which the current has worn under the banks.

In the brown depths the trout are lying, and over the smooth surface the burnished dragon-fly, in his hot youth the tyrant of the water and now for a space the terror of the air, skims lightly,

"And tilts against the field,
And down the listed sunbeam rides resplendent
With steel-blue mail and shield."



THE KINGFISHER'S HAUNT.

Little islands that just show above the stream, and the brown fringe of sand that skirts the shore, bear the marks of many a water-loving bird and beast.

This is a lazy stream.

"Never schoolboy in his quest
After hazel-nut or nest,
Through the forest in and out
Wandered loitering thus about."

The sandpiper that starts up with sudden cry has vanished round the bend of the river almost before the white flicker of its tail-coverts caught the eye.

Farther on, where, under grey-headed pollards whose slender branches meet from either bank, a ridge of brown pebbles breaks the silence of the stream, are the ruins of a weir. The faint sound of footsteps in the grass is silenced altogether by the music of the ripples, and your coming is unnoticed by the kingfisher that stands on the old stonework, with mind intent upon the stream. So near he is that you may easily discern his long sharp bill, the streak of orange past his eye, the warm red of his breast, the green spangles on his crown, the marvellous sheen of the blue over his tail. Suddenly from round the curve sails a bright gleam of green and azure. The new-comer is aware of danger. At her loud warning cry her mate flies down; and side by side above their image in the smooth brown water the two birds swiftly skim the stream and vanish round the grey veil of the trees.

IN BLACK AND WHITE

AUTUMN has come and gone with—

> "—— the light of his majestic look,
> The wonder of the falling tongues of flame,
> The illumined pages of his Domesday Book."

Following swiftly on the sudden putting off of summer, and the brief and splendid pageantry of red and gold, a few stormy days have scattered to the winds the fiery splendour. There is colour still upon a beech-tree here and there; the yellow leaves still flutter on the elm; the few last sprays of creeper shine like fire upon the cold grey walls. But the branches for the most part are bare and shelterless.

No leafy screen hides now the secrets of the wood. He who will may watch the jays as they wrangle in the tree-tops; can follow the woodpecker's flight as he sweeps from tree to tree; can mark more plainly now than ever the black and white plumage of the pie.

The magpie is a bird who never seems desirous to cultivate a close acquaintance. Your mere appearance in the field will drive him to take wing. The more quiet and cautious are your movements, the more will you awaken his suspicion. Caution and quietness are associated in his crafty mind with deeds of mischief; with raids upon the hen-roost, with the slaughter of the innocents. Well does he know that when he ventures near man's dwelling he takes his life in his hand; the traditions of his race remind him that none of all his clan will meet with shorter shrift.

The magpie is one of those birds which always have been marked for popular disfavour. When a price is offered for the heads of rooks, or when a village club takes arms to exterminate Jack sparrow, the birds have nowadays no lack of champions. Some, indeed, are like Waterton, who defended the starling for the truly British reason that there was nobody else to stand up for him; but there are many in these more enlightened days who discourage the killing of the birds, because they are no longer blinded by ignorance and prejudice.

But where the sparrow and the rook are spared, while there is law for the innocent kestrel and protection for the harmless, necessary owl, on the crow is a mark like that of Cain. He is a bird of ill omen. His dress and manners brand him as a thief and outlaw.

But it is doubtful if even the crow has a reputation more blown upon than the pie. Not even the crow, with all his villany, can rank in craft and cunning with the suspicious, unscrupulous, Ishmaelite magpie.

And yet, to give even the magpie his due, he is, in the main, a friend to man. His services may be unwillingly rendered. It is very likely true that he would not trouble himself to hunt for snails or dig for chafer-grubs if there were hen-roosts to be harried, chickens to be lifted from the farm-yard, or young rabbits to be poached in the warren. But even if his good works are done against his will, his labours in destroying vast quantities of vermin, snails and grubs, rats and mice, ought to count for something in his favour. But among the ghastly rows that rot upon the keeper's gallows, there will probably be found more magpies than all other birds together. And although, like all his race, he is for the greater part of his time more friend than foe to the unbelieving farmer, it is altogether against the will of his unthankful suzerain. The farmer would none of him. The only dealings that he holds with his unscrupulous retainer are of the nature of those billets which the superstition of the soldier attaches to all bullets. His character is in a manner written over the gateway of his fortress. No bird defends his own with such elaborate precautions. No bandit chief ever drew about his stronghold a stouter barricade.

Watch an old magpie in the small hours of a late spring morning, flying noiselessly from tree to tree until he has reached the precincts of the homestead. In a great walnut-tree in the orchard he waits, motionless and silent, until a careful scrutiny has satisfied him that no danger lurks among the out-buildings. There is a brood of chickens scattered along the hedgerow, into which two or three of the fluffy brown balls have wandered. One scrambles through the hedge into the orchard, right under the walnut-tree. In a moment the magpie is down; his merciless beak has gripped the hapless youngster. There is a faint cry of agony, but before the infuriated hen can struggle through the hedge, the bandit is already bearing his ill-gotten booty to his stronghold.

Day by day, if no avenging volley should cut short his murderous career, the visit will be repeated, until of all the busy crew that, but a week ago, followed their proud mother to the field, there is only a miserable remnant left.

Just as there is no more certain sound than the chatter of a magpie, so there is no woodland figure whose dress is more easily distinguished; and not only is his plumage bold and striking, but it is by no means so plain as a distant glimpse might suggest. His broad tones of black and white make the magpie ever a bird of mark, but it needs a nearer view than he is willing to allow to show him off to best advantage. Not only is the white so very pure and spotless, the black so very deep and glossy, but there is upon his wings and tail a changing light of green and purple that may rank in beauty with the splendid colour in the wing of the teal or the shining velvet on the head of the mallard.

Perhaps no prejudice holds its ground more firmly, or has a wider sway, than that which views a single magpie as an augury of ill. To this very day the men of Devon are said to spit thrice over the right shoulder and mutter a scrap of rhyme when the ill-omened bird is seen. Still the Somersetshire yeoman bows to it gravely to avert the ill-luck foretold by its appearance. There are families even now who maintain that a magpie always appears at the window where one of the line lies dying. Swedish folk-lore sees in it a disguised magician. The peasant of Switzerland regards with terror its appearance on his roof. So close is it in league with powers of evil that the Oldenburg farmer scares it from its tree by cutting a cross upon the bark.

But though in Tyrol you may craze the brain of your enemy by making him drink the water in which the flesh of a magpie has been boiled, the self-same potion in the hands of a parish priest of Saxony has been used as a remedy for the falling sickness! The story goes that when, after the Crucifixion, all other birds prepared to show their grief, the pie would only put on half mourning. His punishment has been to wear it ever since, and that his name shall be associated far and wide with ideas of evil.

Widely as the magpie is distributed, there are places where, like the sparrow, it has gained a footing only in modern times. In Ireland, for example, it is not a native, and was imported out of pure malice, as some writers say, by the Sassenach invader. According to one account he went over with the Orangemen. And some there are, no doubt, who might be heard to hint that his manners are symbolic of his origin—

"That in spite of all temptations
To belong to other nations,
He remains an Englishman!"

The sister island has no lack of magpies in our days. In the North of Ireland a troop of twenty is by no means rare, and once at least more than two hundred magpies were observed in noisy conclave, debating in no measured tones some urgent business of the State.

The magpie is spoken of by one high authority as a bird that has become rare in England. This is very likely true of the highly cultivated enclosures and jealously guarded game coverts of the Home and the Eastern counties; but in grazing districts, especially in a hilly country, where copse-land and clumps of trees have not been cleared to make way for the plough, it is —at least in the farmer's eyes—all too common still.

The magpie's nest is pointed to by many legends as the triumph of the builder's art. One tale relates how all the birds assembled in a crowd to take lessons of the chief constructor; how they watched him at his work, with a running commentary of "I thought that was the way to begin;" "Certainly, I knew that must come next;" "Anybody could tell how to do that;" until the exasperated pie broke off abruptly, saying it was clear they could need no help from him. Since then, the legend adds, no bird but he can build a perfect nest. It is the stronghold of a freebooter. It is roofed and barricaded with such a strong defence of thorns, and all the branches near are so interlaced with sticks and briers, that it is often no easy matter to effect an entrance. And if ever he is driven to make his home low down, as in the stunted trees of Dartmoor—one of those solitary thorns, perhaps, that the moormen shun as the trysting-place of fairies—he makes up for the weakness of the site by the added strength of his outworks.

The tall, straggling hawthorn hedges of the West country are the very place for him; but even in the tree tops his nest is still a fortress.

Who is there that can look back on birds'-nesting days at all who does not remember the storming of some magpie's nest, that in the school-boy world was of more moment than the taking of the Great Redan?

In the tallest of the tall fir-trees in the copse was dimly seen among the topmost branches the outline of the nest. Only by good honest swarming up a straight and slippery stem, without a bough to help the climber, could the eggs be taken. From the shoulders of two companions the oldest hand sprang to the attack. The old bird, secure in the height of her tree and the strength of her defences, sat on unmoved. But at length, alarmed by the shaking of the stem and the shouts and laughter of the little group below, she left her nest, and, settling in a tree near by, chattered loud her indignation. And then her mate appeared, and with eager clamour the two birds flew restlessly from tree to tree, watching the varying fortunes of the stormer.

It was a hard pull; but, at last, panting and struggling, the climber was safely anchored in the branches. A moment's pause to examine the contents of the nest, a triumphant shout to the expectant group beneath, and then, holding in his teeth the cap that bore the precious spoil, he descended, as slowly as he might, to earth again.

Small heed was paid in those days to scratched face and bleeding hands; still less to tattered trousers. The only question was whether the eggs were "sat" or not.

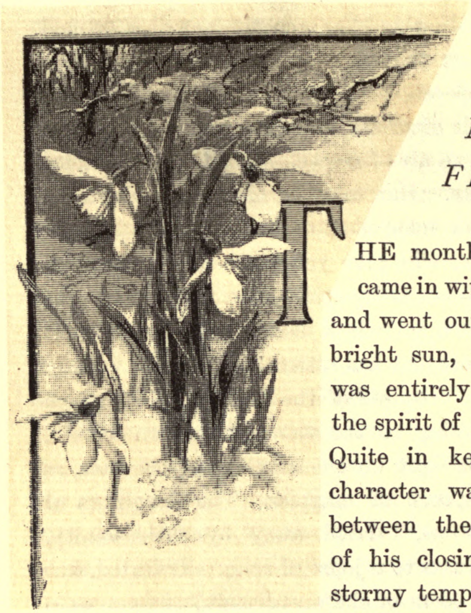
Nor was much notice taken of the indignant owners of the nest, who, scolding, chattering, swearing, kept up their angry protest till their foes were out of sight.

The magpie's note is an index of his character. A troop of pies, holding as they sometimes will a council in the tree-tops on the edge of the wood—with their clear scraps of speech, their short, sharp questions and replies, the signals of scouts, and the grave comments of the elders—have an air of respectability in spite of some degree of curtness. But take an old magpie unaware, or scare him from some deed of blood or plunder, and his language then will give you more insight into his nature. An unquiet, noisy spirit—the first to raise the hue and cry at the approach of danger; the last to settle down when the intruder has retreated.

In one of those accounts of the origin of birds which are foreign altogether to the views of modern science, Ovid throws some light on the ancestry of the race, as well as on the speech of magpies. The daughters of Pierios, he tells us, carried away by their vanity, challenged the Muses to a joust of song. Defeated, but not shamed, the jeers of the unsuccessful singers were cut short by their swift translation to a set of magpies. Driven to the woods, goes on the story, they still keep up their unmusical clamour:

> "The same their eloquence, as maids or birds;
> Now only noise, and nothing then but words."

FAIR MAIDS OF FEBRUARY



THE month of March that came in with wind and rain, and went out with blue sky, bright sun, and gentle air, was entirely in accord with the spirit of the old proverb. Quite in keeping with his character was the contrast between the calm sunshine of his closing days and the stormy temper of his youth. Nothing in his life, indeed, became him like the leaving of it. And the opening days of April have been days of splendour still, in spite of the pitiless winds. The trees everywhere are breaking into leaf, their fresh green untarnished by the cruel winds that so often at this season beat down and blight the opening foliage. The moon of daffodils is on the wane. The blaze of yellow that shone among the bare March thickets earlier on is fading in a mist of green.

We make much of flowers that blossom in these early days. The bright eyes of the speedwell never seem again so blue, nor flowers of celandine so richly wrought in gold. All the more, perhaps, we prize them because of the ever-felt misgiving, the fear that waits and will not be denied, that they have come before their time; that snow may hide and bitter wind cut down these first-fruits of the spring. When we watch the white clouds sail the tranquil sky, when we gather the first sweet violet in the hedge-row, while we hear the songs of birds, the bleat of lambs, we are tempted all too soon to cry:

"Winter is past: lo! sunshine and spring weather!
We will forget the things that once have been."

Yes, that is just it. We forget that to-morrow may bring back the frost and snow; we are unconscious, till we face it, how keen is still the air.

Some flowers of early spring are but survivors from the previous summer—waifs that in warm nooks have lingered, unharmed by touch of frost. Such is the lychnis, torch of wintry woodlands; such the Herb Robert, amongst whose crimson stems the blossoms of last year are showing still. Some again, such as the daisy, have but begun a season that will last the livelong year. Others, like the snowdrop, live out their brief lives in still half-wintry days, and, dying on the very threshold of the year, never see the sun of April or the flowery prime of May.

There are no allusions in old writers to the snowdrop as an English wild flower. Its escape may indeed date much earlier back; but Gerard, so late as the close of the sixteenth century, mentions it as a plant which had recently established itself beyond the bounds of cultivation. There is little likelihood that it is really native here. Even in its most secluded haunts it is doubtless an estray from some long dismantled garden, of which, except such outcasts as were strong enough to hold their own among the rightful tenants of the wild, all trace has disappeared.

There are many plants of field and hedge-row which are naturalised foreigners. Even the elm came over with the Romans, and the ivy-leaved toadflax—the Mother of Millions of the cottage wall—is said to have been brought originally from the Mediterranean. But the snowdrop, native here or not, has at least established well its rights of citizenship. It has wandered far, and made itself thoroughly at home; and of all the flowers whose presence brightens the morning of the year, no warmer welcome is accorded than to these Fair Maids of February.

The snowdrop is one flower of many once held sacred to the Virgin, and it is linked with her, so monkish legends say, because it blossoms in the winter in memory of her first visit to the Temple with the infant Christ.

Many flowers bear traces in their common, or, at least, provincial names, of this old association. The great convolvulus that hangs its white bells on the summer hedgerow is Our Lady's Nightcap. The green tangle of the wild clematis is Our Lady's Bower. The *alchemilla* of the upland pasture is Our Lady's Mantle; and the most striking British orchis, now, alas, almost rooted out by the greed of inconsiderate collectors, is Our Lady's Slipper. Another orchis, the tiny, graceful plant that in the early days of autumn hides so well its spike of sweet, pale green among the long grass on the hill, is Our Lady's Tresses. With Our Lady's Bedstraw the manger of the Holy Child was filled, while the couch of the Virgin herself was strewn with thyme and sweet leaves of the woodruff, a flower sacred to her still.

The marigold received its name because Mary wore it in her bosom: though other legends link it with a different Mary—her of Egypt, on whose grave the plant sprang up and blossomed in a single night.

The marigold is, to the Mexican, a flower of doom, marking the spots where Aztec warriors were butchered by the men of Cortez. So, on Virginian meadows, clover was thought to blossom on the Red Man's grave. Thus the dwarf elder is said to grow only where the blood of Danes was spilt. From the crimsoned snow of Towton sprang roses white and red. The forget-me-nots of the plains of Waterloo bear traces still of the taint of that fierce conflict. And by the stream of Landen, where William of Orange held at bay so long the chivalry of France, millions of scarlet poppies sprang up in the summer following the fight, tinging anew, as with the rain of battle, all the fatal field.

But the snowdrops are all faded now; even the butterflies are rousing from their winter sleep, and, coming out from faggot piles and roofs and hollow trees, and all the hiding places where, as autumn days grew chill, they closed their worn and stiffening wings, lend their notes of colour to the very sunshine. The great purple eyes of the peacock are dimmed, and the butterfly that suns itself now on a warm stone, opening and shutting its torn wings, has little of the beauty of the splendid new-born insect that with swift and powerful flight sailed over the autumn fields. The Painted Lady of the spring-time is but the phantom of the magnificent beauty of the summer. But the Brimstone shows upon his yellow wings less sign of fading and rough usage, and, as he flits lightly here and there along the hedge-row and across the fields, he looks as bright and beautiful as when in warm days of last September he made his first appearance.

The starling on the housetop has long been prophesying spring. Nowhere, perhaps, are the signs of its approach more plain to read than in his heightened colour and his borrowed song. The armies of starlings that mustered in the autumn and kept together through the winter months are beginning to disband. The town starling, however, never leaves for long his native heath among the chimney-tops. All the year his voice is heard. In the gloomiest days he keeps alive for us the memory of spring and spring-tide singers. When the ground is white with snow we hear upon the housetop the twitter of the swallow. We recognise among the busy sounds that stir the frosty air the familiar flourish of the yellow-hammer. And now the dawn of spring seems to remind him of songsters long unheard. You may hear his faultless rendering of the wryneck's cry before the bird itself has alighted on our shores.

Many birds are busy now with the great work of the year. The heronry is all alive with the clamour of insatiable nestlings. Already the raven meditates turning her sturdy brood adrift.

An old poacher, whose vocation has in bygone days given him better opportunities than most men of studying the manners of this chief of outlaws, maintains that the raven sets to the human race an excellent example in the method of bringing up a family. No plunder is brought home for them after they are strong enough to help themselves. There is no idea at all of allowing them to lead a life of idleness—hanging about with their hands in their pockets, so to speak, while their parents forage for them far and near. "No," said the old man, "she do take up one young bird at a time in her claws, and do carry him into the wood so far s'ever she can, and there she'll lef him, so that he med fend for himself. There do be a sight of idle young fellows about, who did ought to be served just the same way."

The heron and the raven always begin housekeeping early in the year; but by this time, doubtless, there are many young birds crying to be fed.

There is a lull at present in the rookery. The nests are finished and the eggs are laid. Now and then above the ordinary clamour is heard that strange choking sound which tells of an old rook being fed by her mate as she sits upon her nest.

How many a bird's-nester has been tempted, in his younger days at any rate, by the sight of those great piles of sticks, to risk his neck among the slender branches, or, what perhaps is worse, to dare the wrath of the farmer, whose eyes and ears keep jealous watch over his rookery.

The best climber in the company has been having a good time of it among the tree-tops, while the indignant citizens wheeling overhead proclaimed their wrongs to all the country side.

Suddenly a burly figure is seen, coming at swift pace across the field. His round red face, his brandished cudgel, the ominous threats that travel far before him, scatter in hasty flight those of the party who were watching from below. The climber alone is in the tree, and mindful of the plunder in his pockets he cautiously descends the trunk of the great elm, landing on the turf before the very eyes of the farmer. Under a heavy fire of abuse and promises of chastisement, pockets are emptied and the spoil reluctantly surrendered. The baffled bird's-nester beats an undignified retreat, followed off the field by threats of vengeance—summons, county gaol; threats that will attend him perhaps in sleep, and break his rest by dreams of magistrates and men in blue.

Time softens even memories such as these. And who shall say that, in the sight of the young collector, the couple of great eggs broadly splashed with green and grey, that escaped by some means from the general confiscation, will rank the lower among the treasures of his cabinet for that little affair in the rookery?

The return of the birds of passage is after all the plainest sign of spring. When she sends back the swallow we feel that Nature has touched a firmer, stronger note. The impatient fancy of the naturalist paints in every flying figure on the April sky the first returning swallow.

A few birds of passage have already reached their summer quarters. The closing days of March brought the first chiffchaffs. Now, the woods are full of them. Everywhere among the tree-tops sounds the chiffchaff's cheery call. He is but a tiny bird; only next in size to the diminutive goldcrest and his rarer fire-crowned cousin. But he has a far-reaching voice, that now is plain to hear above the mingled chorus of the woodland. The whinchat and the wheatear are back in their old haunts on the hill. The song of the willow-warbler floats softly from his rest among the elm-tops, and in the copses sounds already the tuneful whistle of the blackcap.

SLEEPY HOLLOW

On the edge of a broad valley in the green heart of Mendip lies a little hollow in the hills; an eddy on the uneventful stream of quiet country life, into whose still depths are drawn the timid poets of the air, and in the sanctuary of whose far retreat the tenants of the copse and hedge-row love to linger.

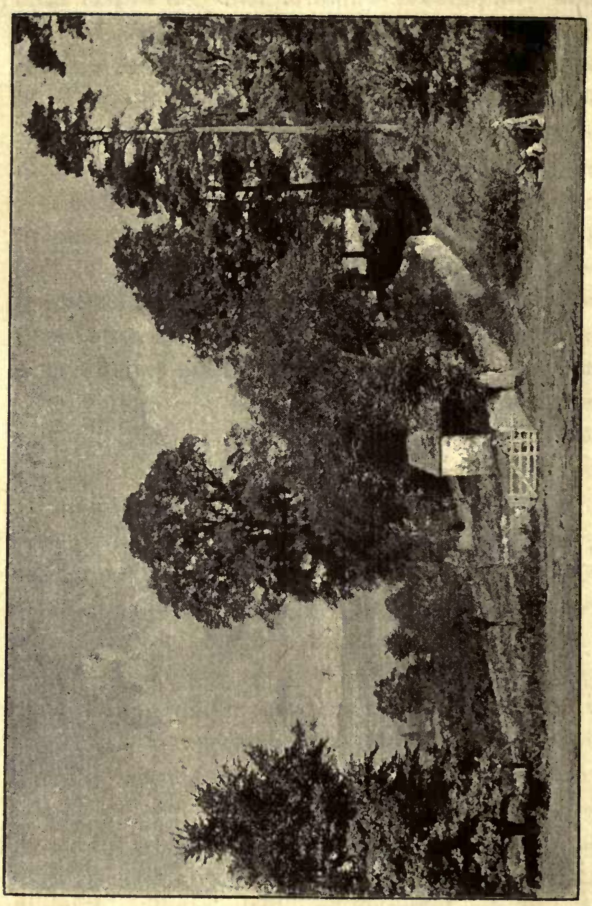
An ancient stile, a rude unchiselled slab of stone, seems to mark the limit of the busy world. Behind it lie the broad pastures and brown sweeps of ploughed land of this pleasantest of Mendip valleys; before it are the sunny fields and peaceful orchards of the slopes of Sleepy Hollow. Along the broad white highway near, passes the stir of wheels, the tramp of feet; and through the wires by its side there throb unheard the restless pulses of the busy world. But never ripple of unrest can enter here.

From the deserted homestead the tide of human life has long since ebbed away. Above grey orchard boughs floats the blue smoke of one rude dwelling left stranded as it were beside the path. But ruin has fallen on the buildings of the farm, whose busy stir once filled the hollow with pleasant sounds of toil. No careful hand prunes now among the wilderness of barren boughs. Few footsteps linger by the well. No track of wheel is seen upon the grassy way save when, in the evening of the year, some waggon rumbles down with the red harvest of these wilding trees, or bears to some distant stackyard the thin sheaves from sterile upland fields.

But among the lichen-coated branches, in the hollows of old elms and ruined walls, the pulses beat of that remoter world that he alone may tread who, with hushed voice and noiseless footfall, will in green lane and orchard watch and wait. For him who will are played among these quiet scenes the endless dramas of a gentle life.

A wandering footpath across pleasant fields leads to this true West-country stile, on the brink that overlooks the hollow. The path beyond, passing the precincts of the deserted farm, and bordered by a straggling orchard, winds downward to the well—is shaded then by the hedge-rows of a narrow lane, skirts the brown hill-side touched with blossomed furze, and loses itself at last in a wilderness of lichen-covered trees, whose old gate joins the Roman roadway under the steep brow of Mendip.

Easy it is to wander here unseeing. Easy to find, in dull lane and orchard tenantless, a single summer hour too long. A careless footstep ever breaks the spell. The clumsy clatter of a gate will frighten in a moment all the tenants of the glen; a noisy laugh drive off in hasty flight whole troops of timid actors. But for him who has watched above the hills



SLEEPY HOLLOW.

the dawning grow, who through hot noons has lingered in the orchard shade, seen twilight shadows deepen in the valley, who knows in spring-time where the violets bloom and robins build, who has reaped the harvest of its summer days, and knows where vipers bask and nightjars haunt, who has found on its brown slopes the quiet autumn flowers, has traced upon the snow the footprints of its populace, the memories of thirty years have left a record on each sunny bank, a tradition in the very brambles of the hedge-row, a legend in the caverns of each ancient elm. For him there is no path but leads his fancy down the vanished years, there is no lane without its phantoms, no tree without its ghost,

> "No quiet nook but treasures up
> Some memory fond and true."

A touch of north is in the wind that tosses the dark foliage of the old Scotch firs with a sound as of the sea; but the hawthorn hedge is broad and strong, and, on the warm slope below, the air is hardly stirring. A dreamy haze broods over the cliffs along the hill, deepening the shadows of their cavernous clefts and softening the stern outlines of their rugged steeps. Against the farther ranges hangs a soft grey vapour, on which the tender green of young elm leafage is drawn in clear, cool tones. The cattle on the opposite side of the valley are drowsing in the heat, and at times rush madly down the slope to seek solace at the well below. A party of finches splashing in the brook that wanders from the spring pay little heed to the sounds of galloping feet upon the turf, knowing that no disturbing footsteps follow that headlong rush.

Here in the shade of lichen-covered boughs, glowing with the flush of crimson apple bloom, you may watch at will the tenants of these " orchard lawns and bowery hollows."

Here, in the very morning of the year, the missel thrush came to build her great nest. There was not a leaf to hide it, but so well did the builder match with the scraps of lichen that she wove into the fabric the grey and shaggy bark of the old tree itself, that it may have escaped altogether the keen eyes of the village bird's-nester. Later in the season a whole tribe of little architects found quarters in cosy crannies in the trees. Here the nuthatch barricaded her doorway with a wall of mud, and there the blue tit cut the wood away to make himself an easier entrance. Here in the bright May morning rang the woodpecker's light-hearted laughter. Here all day the chaffinch sang, while his sober-tinted mate sat brooding on her eggs in that exquisite lichen-coated nest of hers, at the end of a drooping bough. But the flycatcher is the genius of the spot. She is a singularly silent bird, of quiet, inconspicuous plumage. But there is a charm about her graceful ways and dexterous movements that wins for her a warm corner in the naturalist's regard.

At daybreak, when shadows were long upon the dewy grass, all the valley was astir with life and music. Now there is a lull. Now when the sun of noon looks down into the hollow, there is more of silence in the trees and hedge-rows.

Not all are quiet. A pipit, resting on the topmost bough of an old walnut-tree, suddenly rises in the air above his perch; and then, pausing a moment, spreads wide his wings and tail, and, singing all the while, floats downward like a falling leaf till he gains once more his station on the tree. His nest is on the ground—perhaps in the hoof mark some horse has stamped into the turf—and his mate, brooding patiently over her dark-brown eggs, is listening at this moment, no doubt, to the song with which he seeks to relieve the tedium of her vigil.

Along the green hawthorn hedge a pair of restless whitethroats are flitting. Now they chatter softly to each other in the cool depths of their covert. Now one of them, balanced on a bramble spray, swells with song that slender little throat of his with a rapid burst of melody, until it shows as clear a patch of white against the hedge as the blossoms of the wayfaring tree farther on. The song grows faster and faster, until it seems a marvel how such rapid utterance is possible at all. Now the little minstrel soars a few feet into the air, warbling all the while, and then dives back into his covert, singing still. Now his voice softens and sinks lower, lower yet, till it is hardly heard, as if he were whispering soft strains of love in the ear of his more silent mate, after proving as he has to all the world his right of fellowship with singers of renown. Then he breaks off suddenly with a harsh "churr, churr" of anger or suspicion. The nest of the little couple is not ready yet. It is a frail structure enough; a little dry grass with a lining of hair, built among the brambles or hidden in the tall growth under the hedge-row—whence the whitethroat's common country name of "nettle-creeper."

High up among the elms that cluster round the stile a blackbird sings at times; and now and then, as if carried quite away by the glory of this fair May morning, he soars from tree to tree, singing as he flies. Another bird across the valley answers him, and, for a minute or two, their staves of mellow music float, like echo and its answer, to and fro across the hollow.

A little troop of swallows are flying round the old farm buildings, floating now and then through the doorway of a cowshed where soon they will begin to build their homes among the rafters. If you stand within the doorway and keep well in shadow, the swallows will pass almost within reach of your arm, with snatches of sweet song that seem to ripple on the sunny air.

Perched on a leafless ash-tree that leans over the gate sits a redstart, one of the very brightest of the rovers who have come back from their winter in the south. We are tempted to call them summer visitors, but this surely is their native heath, where they were born and bred, and where now they are busy in their turn with household cares. The redstart might be sitting for his portrait, though he is almost too far off to study well. Even at this distance, however, can be seen the red on his breast and the bold touch of white over his bill, and, as he flies down suddenly from his perch, you see the flicker of red feathers in his tail, which has earned for him his name, in which *start* is the A.S. *steort*—a tail. He has left the tree to join his mate—a much plainer bird than himself, who is busy on the ground. For a minute or two they fly round and round, uttering soft and tender notes as they circle about each other in the air. Then the more practical hen, on nest-building intent, gathering up the grass she had dropped at the approach of her lord and master, flies off to the ruin, followed a moment later by her handsome mate. In some snug crevice of the wall will be laid the bright blue eggs, to be hatched in course of time into a family of spotted nestlings, as unlike their parents as it is well possible for birds to be.

In a chink in one of the outbuildings a coal-tit built for many seasons her snugly hidden nest. Just above, the flycatcher loves to frame her cradle in the twining ivy-stems, and in the green canopy still higher the blackbird fancies her retreat unseen. Five-and-twenty years at least a wren has built her nest in this crevice in the old barn wall, matching with patient care the dry leaves of the fabric with the colours of the ancient masonry. As surely, too, some curious naturalist or careless schoolboy has touched the structure with incautious hand, and every year the little architect has sought safety otherwhere.

But all the while, above the notes of all the other birds, breaking the half-silence when the rest are still, sounds without pause the cuckoo's cry. And now the sound comes nearer, drifting through the green mist of trees far up the valley, though the bird is still unseen.

Now he comes in view, flying fast across the orchard. Now he sails overhead, not noticing the figure in the doorway. As he floats over to the great elm close by, his voice rises to a perfect shout. Then he settles in the old walnut-tree and calls and calls in loud clear tones, bowing each time, drooping his wings and tail, and varying now and then his more familiar speech by a muttered scrap from some outlandish tongue. There is already in his voice a suspicion of the "altered tune," which all too quickly will be followed by the silence that so completely removes him from the common ken.

Long since the old walnut-tree has passed its prime. Each winter breaks away the dead wood from its withered limbs. Sad-coloured fungi gather round its base. Whole tribes of creatures have their burrows in its rotten wood; troops of beetles hide under its loosened bark.

To the rude stonework round the spring there cling in scores the shells of tiny limpets. How did their ancestors find their way to this secluded well? How was it peopled with even the smallest forms of life—the shells that creep among the stones, the active little shrimps that career across the sandy bottom? Some wandering bird, perhaps, after splashing in a distant brook, brought here upon its feet the tiny spawn.

It is an ancient spring. The hands that fitted these broad flag-stones round its brink were folded for their last sleep long years ago. For centuries the sons of toil have cooled their sunburned faces in a well that never in the memory of man has failed or faltered in its flow.

The hottest summer never checked its bounteous stream; the keenest winter never laid a curb upon its freedom.

But in the old house hard by, whose children dipped their pitchers from the brink, is silence now and ruin. The very sparrow, missing here man's presence, comes no more to rest beneath the eaves.

Shyer birds than he haunt now in summer time these ruined gables. Wagtail and robin hide their nests in hollows in the walls. The flycatcher flutters through the ever open door. Even the grass snake basks upon the spacious hearth, and in the cavernous chimney, blackened by the logs of many winters, the bats in silence wait the twilight hour.

When the old tower rising on the far-hill slope, is through grey mists of sunset hardly seen, will float across the valley the soft sound of evening bells. Perchance in the shadow of that ancient yew lie the spent ashes of the old man desolate, who, with sad eyes, at midnight watched upon this hearth the dying embers of its last wood fire. Does never ghost return to wander in the ruins of his home, no shadowy figure steal at nightfall through the silent rooms? Who shall recall the story of the wasted hearth, its memories of grief and joy, of childhood and old age, of

> "—— youthful dreamers
> Building castles fair with stately stairways
> Asking blindly
> Of the Future what it cannot give them;"

or of old men warming thin hands before the dying glow,

> "Seeing ruined cities in the ashes,
> Asking sadly
> Of the Past what it can ne'er restore them?"

IN NORBURY HOLLOW

THE familiar saying, found in many tongues, that one swallow does not make a summer, is some evidence of the eagerness with which the coming of this welcome bird is waited for. To this very day Greek boys keep festival to honour her return. The Russian peasant, weary of the gloom of his ungentle winter, sees in the swallows messengers from Paradise, bringing summer on their wings, while poets in all lands have sung with rapture of their reappearing.

We have grown so familiar with the sneers of cynics about the fickleness of an English spring, and so much less in some ways does the season mean to us than it meant to our grandfathers, that we are apt, it may be, to forget what a difference there is between the April of our time and the April of a century ago. Steam, which some sanguine electricians say is almost in its dotage now, was certainly in its infancy then. In those days no swift packets crossed the sea; no rapid train connected Paris with the south, that the flowers of the Mediterranean might be brought to us unfaded to fill the gap that winter had made in our dull garden borders. There were no fragrant lilies then in every florist's window; no bright anemones to lend their freshness to the dingy streets. Now, when every tropical forest is searched for rare and curious blooms, and Dives pays cheerfully a hundred pounds for an orchid of which the fellow is unknown in Europe, even the sad eyes of Lazarus are cheered by the colour that the flower-girls scatter in the streets.

Without this spoil of distant lands brought near us by our modern aids, how long would seem the pause between the last rose of summer and the first shy flowers of April!

The greatest boon, no doubt, that spring brings with it is in the lengthening of the days. Without gas or paraffine, with dull oil lamps and the feeble glimmering of candles, the dark of winter nights must have been one of the greatest hardships of living in the country.

Our nights are dark no longer. The plunder of distant meadows cheers the dull days of winter with their fragrant beauty. But we hear no earlier than our fathers did the cuckoo's cry. The years have made no change in the home-coming of the swallows. It is in April that they come back to us. There is, indeed, no month in all the year in which they have not been seen. It has been suggested that those which have been observed in January and February might have wintered in the island, though not, as our forefathers supposed, asleep in hollow trees or under water. Boswell records a remark of Johnson's, which is a fair sample of what we should expect from a man who preferred Fleet-street to the country. "Swallows," said the great philosopher, "certainly sleep all the winter. A number of them conglobulate together by flying round and round, and then all of a heap throw themselves under water, and lye in the bed of a river."

The "early swallow" of newspaper paragraphs is often, no doubt, the sandmartin, always the first of the clan to find her way across the sea. Except by the river bank or about her special haunts she is much less common than the swallow, from whom her plain brown plumage distinguishes her well.

Perhaps the house-martin is the best known of all the race. She it is who builds beneath our eaves, and brings, so legend says, good fortune where she rests. She is not so completely a follower of man as the swallow, and will make her nest against a cliff sometimes, even when there are houses near. Like many birds, the martin is fond of building in colonies. On one house wall in a Bavarian village, eighty-two nests were counted in a line; and it is said that in Lapland, where the natives fix boards against their houses to encourage the little builders, collections of nests have been seen numbering far more than that.

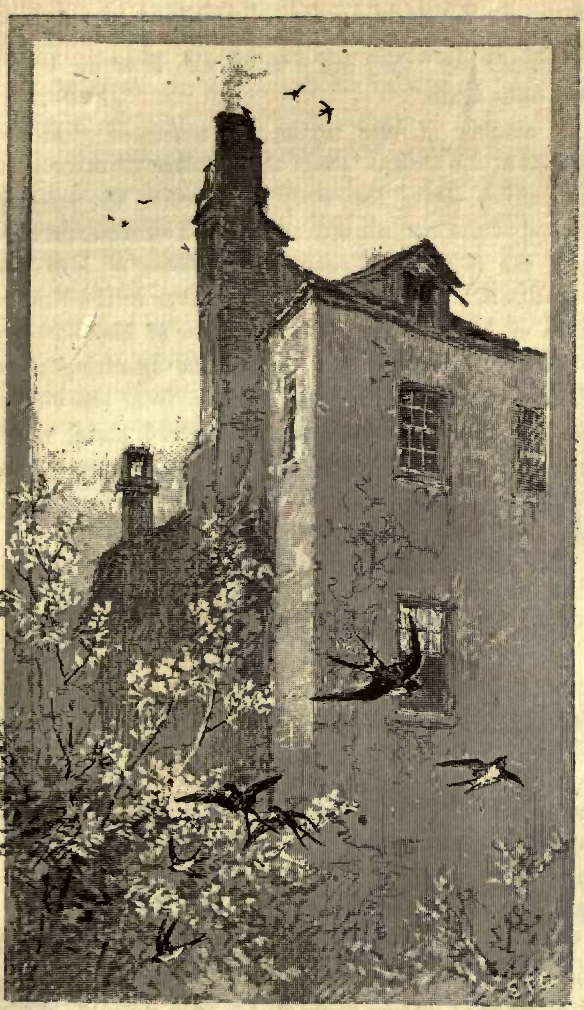
Less is seen of the housekeeping of the swallow, for she does not, like the martin, build under the eaves. If Plutarch's story—that swallows made their nests on the stern of Cleopatra's galley—be correct, it was in all respects an unusual place to choose. The nest is almost always out of sight—among the rafters of an outhouse, in a chimney, sometimes even in the shaft of a well. In the hall of a village inn in the Tyrol a pair of swallows build each year under a bracket on the wall, and flutter in and out and feed their nestful of youngsters, and seem, like them, to care nothing for the noises of continual traffic.

The swallow wears at his return his very brightest plumage. He went from us in the evening of the year with feathers frayed and faded, with colours dimmed by sun and rain. He comes back to us with wings unworn, with new lustre on his purple plumes, new chestnut on his throat, new gloss upon his crown.

Why should he return at all? Why should he prefer our changeable climate to the brightness of his winter haunt, why not settle with content among the vines and fig-trees of the south?

Swallows spend the summer much farther northward even than our islands. They nest a long way within the Arctic circle. They are met with in Siberia and Ceylon, in China and Australia, and are indeed among the most widely distributed of birds.

Many myths and legends have gathered round the history of the swallow, and while the folk-lore of not a few birds is linked with trouble and disaster, that of the swallow is associated chiefly with good fortune. There are, it is true, some Celtic races who regard the bird with disfavour. A swallow fluttering down a chimney is held by some to be augury of death; and in Norfolk, when the departing swallows settle on the church-roof



"HE COMES BACK WITH WINGS UNWORN."

the people say "they are settling who is to die before they come again."

A number of bird myths are associated with the legends of the Cross. From the folk-lore of more than one nation comes the story that when the sparrow mocked at the sufferings of our Lord, a swallow, perched upon the fatal rood, sang tender notes of love and consolation. The crossbill wears for ever in the strange shape of his beak, and the red stain of his plumage, tokens of his efforts to draw out the agonizing nails. The robin, too, by breaking a thorn from the crown, received on her breast a drop of sacred blood, which tinges still her ruddy feathers. The swallow carried the whole crown away, and the red upon her throat still shows how she was wounded in the effort.

Many old writers allude to

"—— that wondrous stone which the swallow
Brings from the shore of the sea to restore the sight of
its fledglings."

It is said that these stones are still met with among the peasants of Britany. They have even been examined by a naturalist, who describes them as resembling the operculum of some tropical sea-shell. No less great, according to the legend, is their power over the eyes of human beings, and he who wears one is considered safe against the falling sickness.

The swallow is not the only bird acquainted with such stones of magic. The raven is said to restore its young to life by the help of a stone that it finds upon the shore. The Tyrolese peasant finds in the nest of the jay a stone which renders its wearer invisible, and its presence is said to be the cause why the nest is so seldom discovered.

In the absence of the stone the swallow can restore sight to her young by means of the celandine, though the charm perhaps hardly lingers in the more prosaic plant of this incredulous age. More potent still is the "springwort,"—whatever that may be, with which the woodpecker can clear away obstructions from her nest. Upon the wearer this herb of power confers resistless strength, unlocks for him the strongest door, keeps in his purse an inexhaustible supply. No wonder such a plant is keenly sought for! Nor is, perhaps, the wonder less that the woodpeckers, watching from their covert in the leaves the unskilfulness of the searchers, should deride their useless toil with peals of mocking laughter.

It is a pleasant myth that sees in the presence of the swallow an omen of good fortune to the homestead. Even in this sober age there are perhaps but few who would copy the old pew-opener of a little church upon the Severn, who, after lamenting that "they dirty birds have been a-building again in the porch," added complacently, "but I've been working at them with a broom, and *I've* daunted them!"

Nor do the swallows alone return. By long silent ditches, whose slow-moving waters drain the moorland, the sedgewarbler sings again. Among the dry reeds that rustle round him new points of green are springing, and tiny flowers of ranunculus look like flakes of snow upon the water. The wryneck pipes among the orchard boughs. Wood and copse and moorland have each their welcome guests.

May is the most musical of all months, with many birds at least, but he who would hear the singers at their best must listen for them at sunrise or in the evening twilight. The blackcap still sings early and late; and the three small dwellers in the tree tops—who yet build their nests upon the ground—the woodwarbler, the chiffchaff, and the willow-wren, sing at all hours, all the livelong day. The missel-thrush gave up long ago his wild melodies, though he is prompt to lend his harsh alarm note to the general clamour whenever a suspicious blackbird contrives to set the woodland in an uproar. His brood is fledged and flown, and it is quite upon the cards that you may chance on one of the speckled-breasted crew gazing from the hedgerow with wide dark eyes on the wonders of the newly-discovered world. So intent he is, and so wholly unaware of danger, that you may nearly touch him with your hand before he flutters from his perch to seek the company of his fellows, who are scattered now over the country.

The tide of green that every year fills this hollow to the brim is nearly at the full. The smoke of distant chimneys is black on the bark of its old beech trees, and the feathery leafage of its birches is shaken by the wind of passing trains. But there is no stain yet on the green fans of its stately chestnuts; the noble foliage of its sycamores is unpolluted still. In the warm May rain and sunshine its trees have grown unchecked, unblighted, and are wearing now those soft, pure tints that will vanish in the fuller majesty of June. June will throw a deeper shadow under these old elms, but their delicate drapery will never be again so fresh and fair. The oak and ash still lag behind, though the oak at least is swiftly coming into leaf, and there will be, by the end of the month, cover enough for the figure of a man among the leaves alone, though Prince Charles's hiding place was on the broad top of a pollard—a much more effectual screen from the eyes of Roundhead scouts than the foliage of the greenest oak that ever grew.

Much faster than the foliage of the grey ash saplings grow the dark leaves of the bryony that coils about their stems. Young sprays of woodbine, too, find their way far up among the branches, and like the bryony follow the sun from east to west as they wind about the trees. Soft and tender now at starting, those lithe young stems will cut deep into the boughs that help them upward.

The wind that stirs among the thickets brings with it all the perfumes of the woodland: the sweet odour of unfolding leaves, breath of sweetbriar and of woodruff, and the fragrance of the graceful larch boughs whose blossoms are hardening into smooth brown cones.

Everywhere in the clearings, and even in the green heart of the underwood, summer flowers are glowing. Stray handfuls of bluebells here and there lend little to the landscape, for all their grace and heavy perfume. But when in broad masses they fill the hollows in the wood, cluster on the slopes, and spread far out across the open spaces, they seem like a dark blue mist floating on a sea of green. The flowers of the wild arum—the lords and ladies of the village children—have passed their prime. The tall, green sheath has done its work and is required no longer. The arum would bear no seed were it not for the insects which carry pollen from one flower to another. From its peculiar structure it is necessary that some at least of the flies that enter it—probably attracted by its coloured central spike—should spend some time in the green tube. Thus there is provided a fringe of hairs round the inner stem which allow the little visitors to pass into the interior, but effectually bar their exit until the pollen, which it is intended they shall carry away with them, is ready to be scattered over their bodies. Then the hairs wither and the flies escape. Two arum flowers recently examined contained respectively no fewer than 253 and 310 small insects thus held captive. The majority were dead, but some were still vigorous, supported, perhaps, by the honey secreted at the bottom of their prison. That a good many flies do escape and carry pollen to other plants, we learn in the autumn from the lustrous berries that shine like clusters of red coral under every hedgerow.

Beyond the narrow limits of the glen, the coarse grass of undulating upland pastures stretches away to the outlying ranges of the Peak. In the solitude of those bare brown hills, in the manor bestowed by Richard II. on a Legh, who had borne the Royal Standard on the field of Cressy, there lingered until recent years a few of the famous wild white cattle. Tall and stately beasts they were, larger than any others of their race. But these children of the primeval forest, guarded so long with jealous care, have now entirely died out. They were fierce and powerful animals, and their fickle temper was dreaded even by their keepers, one of whom carried lately to his grave terrible scars from their huge horns.

Not far off, at Somerford in Cheshire, a few wild cattle still survive, of the same stock no doubt as the vanished beasts of Lyme. Others are preserved at Chartley, in Staffordshire, and there is a herd of more than fifty among the hills of Lanark. Perhaps at least as numerous is the better known breed of Chillingham, in Northumberland.

Tradition regards these wild white cattle as a real aboriginal race. It is held by high authorities that they are descended from the old denizens of the British forests, whose effigies have been handed down to us on the coinage of Cunobelin.

A puff of steam that rises at regular intervals from among the trees half-way towards the hills marks the presence of a coalpit, and whenever the wind happens to set this way the throb of the engine is even at this distance plainly heard. The engine house is hidden by the clustering elms, and here, for once, an added touch of beauty in the landscape is due to so unpromising a source as the working of a colliery. The water from the shaft, collecting in a deep hollow in the undulating ground, has formed a broad pool, which Nature already begins to claim for her own. Round the margin of the lake marsh-marigolds have drawn a fringe of gold. Sedge-warblers have found their way already to its thickets.

Nor from this sylvan sanctuary has the rattle of the railway or the smoke of the great city scared away the timid children of the wild. The kingfisher still haunts the brook that loiters round the roots of these old trees, and water-rats come out in the gloaming along those green banks by the stream. It is a gracious spot, amid whose quiet beauty "the tired brickmakers of this clay earth might steal a little frolic;" whose charm will linger—

"Even in the city's throng,"

that they may in fancy still

"—— feel the freshness of the streams
That, crossed by shades and sunny gleams,
Water the green land of dreams,
The holy land of song."

A BARE HILLSIDE

THE thin grass of this wide upland yields but scanty pasture for the beasts that graze along its slopes. Its barren acres, never broken by the plough, are strewn with heaps of stones that in the ages have been gathered from the sterile fields. The ground is scarred with the workings of old miners, who dug here long ago for calamine and ochre.

Across the hayfields in the valley move slowly the lines of mowers, the sunshine flashing on their sweeping scythes. But here upon the hill no sign of life is stirring. A troop of cattle have crept away out of the heat into the cool shelter of a hollow overarched with whitebeam and hazel, and their red coats show now and then through the thick growth of green.

The birds are silent. Only the corncrake's cry comes up at intervals from distant fields, and there is a yellowhammer on the hedge that sings at times a sleepy tune.

The only creatures stirring are the insects. Myriads of flies, that seem to revel in the heat, mock the poor shelter of the stunted trees, and care nothing for the sweep of brandished fern-leaves. Butterflies in brown and blue, in white and yellow, float from flower to flower, and burnet moths flit leisurely along, sunning for the first time, some of them, the black and crimson of their silken wings. Among the larches on the hill crest higher up, the wind at times is sounding like the sea, and when it dies away, is heard that strange, persistent hum—so characteristic of a summer noon—the noise of innumerable wings, the hum of clouds of flies that poise above the resinous branches.

Poor as is the pasture of this dry hill-side, its slopes are glowing like an eastern carpet. Hawkweed and cistus flame like gold among the grass. The ground is strewn with oxeye daisies, crimson clover, and brown seeds of burnet. White flowers of mountain meadowsweet, tipped with the crimson of unopened buds, toss in the wind their little clouds of foam. Tall spikes of mignonette show here and there like pallid flames. Grace and beauty they possess but not the fragrance of their sweet sisters of the garden. The fairy flax, whose slender stems are waving everywhere along the slope, bears easily the rude handling of the wind, but as if shrinking from the touch of man, its delicate blue-veined petals fall away when once the flower is gathered.

In all the blaze of colour, among centaury and St. John's wort, clover and hawkweed, the sober tone of the bee-orchis at first is hardly noticed. It has flowers of singular beauty, of shape and marking so suggestive of the name it bears, that they might easily be taken for bees clinging to the stem. For wings there are the soft rose-tinted sepals. For body, there is the lip of the corolla with its rich brown velvet and bright yellow lines. Among the two hundred and twelve species of our native bees, perhaps there is none of which the flower is a perfect imitation, but there is more than one to which it bears a strong resemblance.

The reason for this curious mimicry is yet to seek. Many flowers are fertilised by insects, which, visiting them in search of honey, carry involuntarily from one plant to another the pollen which is needed to produce fertile seeds. But the bee-orchis has a special arrangement for fertilising itself, and Darwin states that he never saw an insect visit this flower. It is not long, however, since the writer saw a specimen gathered while a real bee was clinging to one of its unconscious copies.

A summer noon is with the birds a time of rest and silence. The few that make their presence felt are youngsters for the most part, dull of dress and of unpolished speech. Such are the young jays and magpies whose voices now and then are heard among the larches, as they roam from tree to tree. Yonder is a little troop of stonechats—five young birds and their parents—on the branches of a hawthorn. The head of the house is a smart little fellow, with his jet black cap, his ruddy breast, his neat white collar. But his wife's attire is of a plainer tone, and the younger generation are rather a clumsy set, with loose and speckled plumage, and with no smartness at all. But they are a lively crew, and the clear "*chat, chat*" of the old birds, is one of the few sounds of life upon the hill.

It was this note, perhaps, that disturbed a pair of partridges from their rest among the flax. They leap a little way into the air, but instead of flying off they settle down again, and crane their necks above the grass. Presently one of them slinks off, runs down the slope, and disappears; but the other, the hen no doubt, holds her ground. She calls loudly twice. Then, at a still louder, deeper note, a dozen little brown birds, much like wrens in shape and colour, and looking hardly larger as they fly, rise from the grass all round her, sail away down the wind, and over the hedge into the next field. The mother, too, has vanished. Her work is done. Crouching down among the flowery jungle, she follows her little family unseen.

A still more characteristic tenant of the spot is one that very possibly may escape notice altogether. All day long she lies quiet and makes no sign. But the nooks and corners of this straggling wilderness are the very places for a nightjar's haunt. Somewhere among the bracken, or behind a safer barricade of furze, or in a hollow in one of the many stone-heaps dotted over the slope, she is brooding on her eggs. She makes no nest at all. Year by year, in the late spring-time, she comes back from her winter home under a tropic sun to the well-remembered spot, and lays on the bare ground two eggs of marvellous beauty. So well does her plumage harmonise with the spot she rests on that there is small chance of seeing her by daylight unless the near approach of footsteps should drive her to take wing. Sometimes when disturbed, the nightjar will not rise from the ground at all, but will scuttle off like a rabbit to the shelter of some neighbouring thicket. Or it may be that, having risen, she will pause in her flight to feign lameness or a broken wing, in the hope of luring you away. Should she settle in a tree, you may notice that she usually perches, not across the bough, but along it, keeping withal so still that it is not easy to distinguish her dull plumage from the branch itself.

You will know the nightjar better when at the hour of twilight she wakens from her sleep. Against a narrow belt of saffron sky, over which the curtain of the night is still undrawn, rise the dim outlines of far hills, dark forms of giant elms, figures of tall poplars towering over the landscape. On the near slopes grey vapours gather, and flood the meadows like a phantom sea. The sounds of day have ceased. Robin and thrush, and even restless blackbird, all are still. Only a troop of swifts, careering overhead, scream for the coming storm. The voices of the home-returning rooks sound faint and ghostlike as they float by unseen. The night is dark and warm, with a suspicion of rain. White moths flit to and fro across the shadows, and now and then goes past the musical hum of some night-roving beetle.

Suddenly among the trees starts a strange sound, a low, clear rattle, like the trill of a tree-frog. Four or five seconds it keeps on one note, then drops a little for a moment, then rises again, and so continues for some minutes at a stretch. It is the cry of the nightjar, the sound indeed that has earned for it its name.

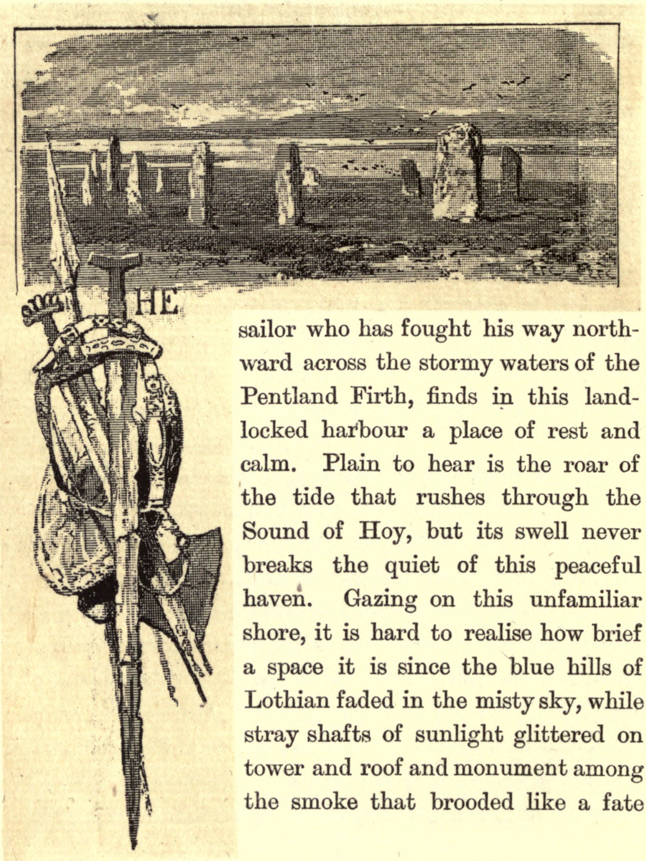
Creeping cautiously along under the trees you are ware that the bird is on the summit of a weather-beaten fir, whose boughs are dark against the sky. The sound continues, monotonous and unvaried, save for that regular rise and fall. It stops short. The bird sails silently down from its perch with a sort of swaying motion like a paper kite, pausing a moment in mid-air, with its wings up, like a pigeon swooping down upon the dovecote. It is only visible against the sky, and when it reaches the outline of the dark hill behind it vanishes like a ghost.

Earlier in the evening, while yet the light was clear, you might have seen it wheeling round the trees like a great swallow, now with its enormous mouth set wide, perchance in chase of moth or beetle, now, uttering as it flew, its monotonous and far-reaching cry.

Seen only in the twilight, and never a familiar figure, it is still a bird of many names. Some, like nightjar, eve-churr, wheel bird, are suggestive of its voice. Others, like dor-hawk and fern-owl, of its habits or its haunts. Its title of goatsucker—a name of long standing, though altogether undeserved—arose perhaps from its habit of chasing the insects which in the twilight are attracted by the cattle feeding in the meadows. Other epithets, less common, are linked with darker legends. Its old English name of *lich-fowl* shows that its appearance was regarded with no common dread. In Danish myth it is Helrakke, the death-hound. Other old world traditions saw in its innocent form "the soul of an unbaptised infant, doomed to wander for ever in the air."

THE CRUISE OF THE THEKLA

I.—ULTIMA THULE



THE sailor who has fought his way northward across the stormy waters of the Pentland Firth, finds in this landlocked harbour a place of rest and calm. Plain to hear is the roar of the tide that rushes through the Sound of Hoy, but its swell never breaks the quiet of this peaceful haven. Gazing on this unfamiliar shore, it is hard to realise how brief a space it is since the blue hills of Lothian faded in the misty sky, while stray shafts of sunlight glittered on tower and roof and monument among the smoke that brooded like a fate above the buildings of the noble city; how short a time it is since the *Thekla* left her moorings on the Forth, and drifted northward with the veering breeze.

Then as the wind grew stronger and the spinnaker was set, like a broad white wing, how swiftly passed the long, low hills of Fife, the bright green fields, the red, well-ordered villages, the strips of yellow sand! How well the good ship rode the great green rollers! How lightly, too, the sea birds rose and fell upon the heaving waves.

The craft itself and the mere working of it are endless sources of delight. But there has been many a time when the wind was fair and the ship well under way, when the sailor's eye, grown weary of the monotonous expanse, has lingered gladly on the figure even of a solitary gull, on the wet plumage of a diver that showed himself a moment on the surface, or on the crowds of sea-fowl whose white forms lined the reefs and ledges of some iron coast.

At times a troop of puffins will cross the ship's course, the old birds in black and white, and with quaint and brightly coloured beaks—the sea-parrots of the fisherman. Each pair is followed by their one dusky fledgling, as unlike its smart parents as it is possible for bird to be. Then, as they are right under the bow, and the yacht is just upon them, swift as thought they vanish, diving underneath the waves. The razor-bills cruise more in couples, the mother leading the way, her single nestling paddling in her wake. The old bird looks anxiously round, and calls "*Arragh, arragh;*" and presently, if the little argonaut is slow in coming up—

finding it hard to fight its way through the rough water—she calls again, lengthening out her cry into a loud and imperative "*Ar-r-r-ragh!*" answered by a feeble and piteous plaint from the belated youngster. Then, with a positive wink of white plumage, they dive, reappearing presently far astern.

Compared with the white figures of the gulls, or even the spotless breasts of razor-bill and puffin, the plumage of the gannets seems like snow against the dark water or the murky sky. Even a party of them flying near the shore, so far off as to appear but part of the vast flocks of sea-gulls faintly seen like clouds of dust scattered in the air, when they fall presently into line, are painted in a row of bold white dots upon the bare black cliff behind them.

Now and then a cormorant swims by, perhaps with his body under water, showing only his long neck and a dark head that turns anxiously to left and right for a brief space before he sinks down beneath the surface.

Most beautiful, perhaps, of all, are the terns, sailing past on graceful wings, wheeling, poising, swooping down like troops of light-hearted swallows.

The sun was low as we sailed by Bervie town, and at length above Dunottar he sank in a wild and stormy sky. Up one great peak a trailing cloud was resting, and upon it the light of sunset was like the glare of fire on the smoke of blazing fields. The dark sails of fishing boats were darker still against the lurid west, and even the white wings of the gannets seemed black upon the crimson sky. All night long the beacons on the shore watched us with their sleepless eyes, until daylight broke at last among the tumbling surges of the Moray Firth.

Stronger blew the wind, and heavier rolled the sea, until, when the wall of Duncansby was past, with its dark face pointing northward like the ram of a battleship, we were in the rush of the tide that streams in from the Atlantic, past the "Merry Men of Mey" into the wild North Sea. All the sea was in a tumult. Smooth and oily looking swirls of water divided sweeps of seething waves. Suddenly, above the surge, appeared a school of porpoises that, as if they gloried in the war of waters, leaped high in air, right above the wave crests of the angry sea.

We have cleared the Skerries. Under the cliff of Ronaldshay we can hear the thunder of the surge, and the roar of the sea against the Lother Reef, whose dark arm stretches out, as if to meet us, from the iron shore. The skipper is standing in the bow, puffing hard at his pipe, and balancing first on one foot then on the other —signs unmistakable of difficulty or danger. Yes, it is a tug of war, but the end is clear. We are sailing seven knots, but the tide is running eight. Slowly but surely is the distance lessening between us and that evil-looking reef. The skipper crams his pipe in his pocket and runs aft to take the helm. "She can't do it; get the spinnaker off her, John!" We take in the broad and flapping sail as best we may; all hands haul on the main-sheet. Now she goes about, with a list that sends every unprotected book and pipe and field-glass into the scuppers, to wait for better times. The yacht's bow plunges deep into the sea, the jib is in the water halfway up, the spray flies along the deck and glistens on oilskin and sou'wester. But the brief moment of danger is past; we leave the Skerries far behind. We fly along the south shore of Ronaldshay, sail steadily through a lesser rush of tide, up among the sheltering islands, across this quiet, land-locked sea, until in the gathering darkness the chain goes rattling down, and there is rest for us at last.*

It was only last night that we came to anchor in the bay, in a blinding storm of wind and rain; and now, under the warm August sun the sea is smooth, the wind is still. The long swell that sways at intervals the tall masts of the yacht, and ripples softly on her sides, rocks us gently as we lounge idly on the deck and contrast the tumult of last night with the dream-like quiet of the morning.

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*"'WE' AT SEA."

"The infusion of personalism in British Journalism, in a considerable measure the growth of pernicious influence burrowing in Northumberland Street, crops up in an unexpected quarter. The *Daily News* has a leading article giving a detailed and graphic account of how a yacht cleared the Skerries, and safely anchored in Pentland Firth. At the critical moment, when 'we can hear the thunder of the surge, and the roar of the sea against Lother Reef,' the following passage occurs:—"The skipper crams his pipe into his pocket, and runs aft to take the helm. 'She can't do it; get the spinnaker off her, JOHN!' *We take in the broad and flapping sail as best we may.*" Of course it is no secret that the Editor of the *Daily News*, a brother Journalist of whom we are all proud, received at the baptismal font the name of JOHN. That the skipper, having crammed his pipe in his pocket, should snap out the name, is reasonable enough. But that the incident should, in its colloquial form, be reported in the leading columns of a staid journal, is to say the least, unusual. Since, however, it has been done, we confess to a feeling of regret that the *Daily News* is not yet an illustrated paper. We should like to see a good sketch of J. R. R. adjusting his spectacles before tackling the spinnaker, and proceeding to wrestle with the broad and flapping sail, surrounded by an admiring circle, including 'the heron and the curlew, the seals that bask upon the shore, and the cormorants that dive in mid-channel.'"—*Punch.*

It is a quaint little township that clusters along the edge of the water, with all its gable-ends towards the sea, as if the houses were standing shoulder to shoulder to keep out the wind and the waves. Up and down the harbour dark-sailed fishing boats are drifting, steered by fair-haired children, or by bearded Vikings such as on this very sea manned the keels of Haco or the war galleys of Hardrada. And although the islanders no longer, when harvesting is done, lay down the reaping-hook for the war-axe and the oar, the old adventurous spirit stirs them still, and drives them out from home across far off perilous seas. In the narrow, crooked street of the little town there is hardly a hearth without its vacant chair, its tearful memories of storm and shipwreck.

But pleasant as is the quiet of this little harbour, he who would know the shyer tenants of the islands must find a mooring out of sight even of this simple township. And such a spot we found, in the shelter of a long, low, heath-covered islet whose farther verge was a very paradise for beast and bird.

Putting off in the dingy, and rounding the rocky headland, we drifted gently into the pale green shallows, over forests of dark weed swaying dreamily in the current. There was no sound along the shore, but the low swish of the tide as it lifted the long streamers of the sea-wrack fringing all the rocks. An oyster-catcher fluttered up from the shore, and with clear, musical cry, sailed away seaward. Then, wheeling in, he settled down once more to his meal among the weed. Suddenly, from the water near, a seal lifted his sleek brown head for a moment, and then vanished. Now another rose and then sank again. They were not satisfied, apparently; for next time their strange, half-human faces rose, they were much farther out, and then were seen no more.

We grounded the boat among the weed, and strolled along the shore. The grey stones in the low cliff were golden with patches of lichen; dark fronds of spleenwort fringed all the little hollows of the rocks; blue scabious and yellow hawk-weed brightened every crevice. From beyond the little headland came suddenly into sight a party of cormorants leisurely paddling, all in line, towards some distant fishing-ground; and as we clambered cautiously round the point we were aware of another company close by, grouped among the rocks, standing as if they had not quite made up their minds for their morning plunge. At last one dropped into the water, and another. Then an anxious movement and the turning of many heads betokened that the rest had caught sight of us. Then they took wing, and, with slow and heavy pace, they flew far down the channel towards the open sea.

As we watch their dwindling figures, something in their dusky hue reminds us of those darker wings that, on the flag of Sigurd, flapped along these very seas. These isles are haunted by memories of the Norsemen. From every height and headland looking down, the grave-mounds of old sea-kings recall

> "——that earlier time,
> The bygone rule of force and crime:
> The good old days when might was law,
> And sword and chains held men in awe."

The How of Hoxay, the grassy barrow that has guarded for a thousand years the dust of Horfinn, still looks seaward from the cliff of Ronaldshay. Still may the traveller read among the runes on the walls of the chamber of Maes-howe the epitaph of the sons of Lodbrock. Scattered over the fields of Summerdale the barrows of the nameless slain commemorate still that triumph of the Orcadian arms, five centuries later, when by the shore of Harray the invaders perished to a man.

But these are works of yesterday compared with the Ring of Brogar, whose grey stones stand and wait beside the loch of Stenness. Who shall say by how many centuries they are older than the barrows of the Vikings? To their long-forgotten past no clue remains. Their origin, their plan, their use are all a mystery. A pleasant place under the warm sun of noon is the trench that girds them round, where broad sheets of ling and belts of yellow bedstraw sweeten the soft air of summer that stirs the nodding grass. A few rough cattle wander by the lake; no other sign is near of man's dominion save these grave-mounds of old heroes, those lichened stones that stand upon the heath, mute witnesses of long forgotten rites. Along the shining strand the wind has heaped a fringe of foam. Far into the dark water stretches out a tongue of land dense with a jungle of tall reeds and dwindling to a point of wave-worn stones. A party of gulls is sailing idly down the shore. A troop of widgeon, flying in long line up and down the water, alight at last among the pebbles, disturbing for the moment a little group of plovers that rise into the air with plaintive notes. They settle down again at length and are lost to view among the stones. Now a cormorant, spreading his great wings to dry, startled by some fancied danger, leaves his rock and splashes far along the dark blue water before rising on the wing. And at the sound there rise as if by magic from the green jungle on the shore a score of tall grey necks, and you are ware of a troop of herons standing motionless in the reeds, watching the dwindling figure of the toiler of the sea. A moment more and they are satisfied. It was a false alarm. As sudden as they rose, the crested heads sink down and vanish in the reeds. But again some restless curlew sounds a warning call. In a moment the great herons rise all together from their covert, and gradually falling into line they drift away over the moor. Ducks and plovers, gulls and curlews, are scattered down the shore. Their figures fade, their cries grow fainter in the distance. There is no sound but stir of restless sea-wind in the heath; no movement but of waves and flying foam. Sea birds drifting over, strings of wild-duck flying to the reeds never shun those tall, grey figures. Through them, without thought of harm.

"With his wings aslant,
Sails the fierce cormorant,
Seeking some rocky haunt
With his prey laden."

But as the dusk of evening gathers, and the light of sunset silvers all the waters of the loch, when dark against the glow rise the blue hills of Hoy, when the home-returning herons that pass on slow wings overhead are hardly seen, then to the rambler wandering by the shore the old stones seem in the uncertain light to waken into life, and like a procession of priests to pass with bent heads and slow and stately pace along the margin of the sea.

THE CRUISE OF THE THEKLA

II.—A QUIET HAVEN

More than once did we weigh anchor and attempt to clear from Stromness and the Orkneys. And when at last we got away it was the very feeblest breeze that bore us through the narrow sound.

Slowly the dark outline of the Kame of Hoy died away on the horizon. Slowly the light wind bore us westward down the grim, forbidding coast. All day long we drifted over a rolling sea until, in the haze of sunset, the far cliffs of Cape Wrath were faint and shadowy still. And when at length the dark came down upon the heaving waves it was a night of turmoil and unrest, a night disturbed by the creak of timbers, the rattle of a restless block, the uneasy swinging of the booms. And then, the long hours of darkness ended, the dawn was clear on the great green waves that lash the splintered pinnacles of the Cape. The wind was freshening fast, but it was blowing in our teeth; it cost us many a weary tack, on a tremendous sea, before we lost sight of the lonely lighthouse that clings to the bare brown slope of the headland.

So late was it when at last we gained the entrance of our haven that the steep sides of the Stack were purple in the failing light, and the level sun was glistening on the wet plumage of the cormorants that clustered on the sea-worn rocks of Laxford as we entered the narrow channel. As we made our slow way in and out among the islands, whose bleak sides bore no sign of house, or field, or tillage, there was a sudden rustle among the bracken that clothed a steep brow overhead, and a goat scrambled to a commanding buttress high above us, a bearded patriarch, with flowing hair and wrinkled horns. His bold eyes watched us calmly as we passed his little kingdom, as if he knew that there were none so bold as dare dispute his reign. His shaggy followers, close behind him, peered cautiously through the covert of the ferns; one snow-white kid stood out against the green side of the hill. Then at a signal from their chief, they all leaped lightly down and disappeared.

By the shore a quaint-looking craft was lying, making ready for departure. Her mainsail was up, her men were at work upon the anchor. Two dogs, the last of the ship's company, were swimming off from land. A couple of boats were moored at her side, and touches of colour in them—a bright new shawl, a vivid kerchief, and a scarlet cap—were plain tokens of her business there. She was a floating shop; on whose timely visits the dwellers by these lonely inlets depend for the necessaries of their hard existence. From her they buy their plaids and bonnets, their plates and dishes, their tea, and their tobacco.

Kindly folk they are that inhabit the rude cottages which, among slender patches of oats and scanty sowings of potatoes, nestle in the sheltered hollows among the hills that bound the loch. Crossing a strip of corn-land bright with abundant marigolds, we made our way to one of the houses. A pleasant-faced woman—the master was away at sea—called off with a few words of Gaelic the great, gaunt dogs that disputed the right of way, and greeted with hesitating speech the strangers, slowly shaping her thoughts in the unfamiliar tongue. Her room was bare and cheerless; there was little in it but the dresser with its quaintly-patterned plates, a crazy stool or two, and the huge chest that held the winter stock of meal. But the peat fire glowing on the spacious hearth, the freely offered milk and oatcakes had an air of gracious hospitality. The dogs preserved a sort of armed neutrality, not understanding the dialect of the Sassenach, but, won over at last by bribery and caresses, they parted from us without further signs of hostility.

Past the houses, higher up the stream that wanders to the sea is more than one fresh-water loch among the hollows of the hills, fringed with pale lobelias, and with white water-lilies floating among patches of soft and shining green, haunts of heron and wild duck, and havens for storm-driven seafowl when the wind blows hard to the land. The air was keen along the shelterless shore beneath us; but here under a brow of granite we lie among the scented heather, watching the gulls drift seaward from the hills, the straight flight of the mallard down the lake, the hover of the kestrel on the windy heath.

One of the party took his fly-rod and strolled leisurely round to the farther side. Idly we watched the flash of his line, and the ripple of his flies, and now and then the splash and glitter as he drew a fish ashore. Then, as he got too far for us to watch his movements, silence settled down upon the lake—a pleasant, dreamlike quiet, for to us, after all our fighting with the wind and wave

> "Most weary seemed the sea, weary the oar,
> Weary the wandering fields of barren foam."

A strange figure moving now and then among the bracken might be one of those very figures seen by the weary mariner "between the green brink and the running foam." But no, it is only the bent form of an old woman toiling along with a basket at her back, and matching so exactly the tone of the sad-coloured mountains that the eye can scarcely follow her as she creeps along among the peat stacks.

She meets the angler, now on his return from a none too-successful foray. We can see her gesticulating, we can even hear across the water the murmur of her voice. She was addressing him, as we afterwards found, in most voluble Gaelic, but the only word he felt quite sure of was her parting " Blessing."

There was no Gaelic scholar in our company. With great difficulty we had mastered the equivalents for *Good Morning*, and *It's a wet day*; fine weather being so scarce that we did not think it worth while to load our memories with any reference to that.

The two ambitions of our skipper, as he once confided to us, were to speak Gaelic, and to play "the pipes." "We had a steward once," he said, "who could do them beautifully. He would come and play on deck in the evenings; and, man! it was like heaven."

Fishing in the tarns was poor work, but there was always plenty of sport in the loch below, especially by spinning an artificial sand-eel from the boat. The usual plan was to pay out a couple of lines over the stern of the dingy, and pull slowly along about an oar's length from the shore.

Here under the cliff the air is quiet; there seems no sound or movement but the regular dip of the oar-blades. A troop of curlews catch sight of us as we pass the entrance of their creek, rise all together, and fly farther in behind the shelter of the island.

There is a tug at one of the lines. We haul it hastily in—a rock codling, a two-pounder, a capital fish. Five minutes later we land another—a lythe this time, not quite so large. And then there is a mighty pull; but the fish, whatever it was, was not fairly hooked, and he is off. There is hardly time to lament his loss when there is a lythe on the other line, a monster indeed, half disposed to show fight. But the tackle holds, and he is soon within reach of the boat. "Ready there with the gaff?" That's it; now we have him, a good ten-pounder at least.

We had enough for our needs, and we had watched the skipper haul up a couple of fine cod-fish on the yacht. The lines were got in. We turned the boat into a little harbour that the waves had carved out of the cliff. A hooded crow was busy on the shore, so fearless or so tame that he waited until the keel grated on the shingle before he fluttered up the rocks and flew to some fresh hunting-ground. We had hardly crossed the little beach, with its piles of weed and drift-wood—sea-worn plank and broken oar—when all at once we came on a very sanctuary of birds. Lying at our feet were the smooth levels of a bay, whose narrow entrance farther down screened it altogether from the ocean swell. A score of herons, standing motionless in the water, woke suddenly into life as their solitude was broken, and spread their great wings towards the hills. Curlews and oyster-catchers started up to left and right, with plaintive notes, and hurried down the windings of the shore. Farther off a flock of terns were flying, their white wings doubled in the water as they stooped to touch the smooth brown surface, and sea-gulls soaring far above mingled with the strange cries of the terns their half-articulate speech.

But now the clouds that all day long had been gathering round the Stack began to sweep downward from the hills; before long a squall was driving down the lake. We were well defended however with coats and oilskins, knowing well the moods of West Highland weather, and we cared little for the rain. All thought of shelter too was forgotten when a diver came up within a few yards of the boat. He looked round at us a moment and then vanished. There was little hope of any nearer view. Chasing a diver is an almost hopeless task. Pull as we might he foiled us still swimming under water now this way, now that, coming up now far ahead, now fifty yards astern.

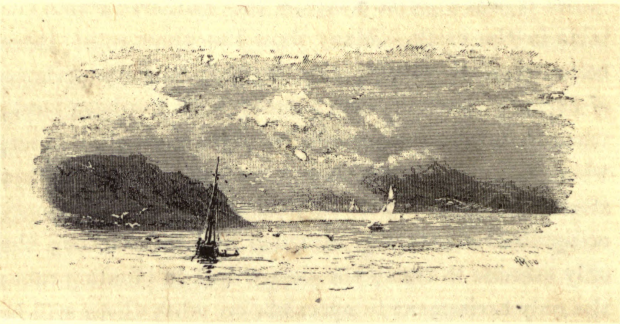
The tide was almost at its lowest, and through masses of floating weed that barred the way we could hardly get the boat along. We were lying on our oars a minute in the more open water where the river runs into the loch, watching the brief gleams of sunlight glisten on the wet faces of the mountains as on sheets of ice. Somewhere high up among the hills sounded the deep croak of a wandering raven. Suddenly, just in front of the boat, there was a flash of silver on the water. It was a salmon leaping, and then another, and another. All round us rose the noble fish, until a score of them at least displayed to our wistful gaze their silvery sides. Fine fellows they were. Indeed, on this little stream that winds down from the hills is the best salmon fishing in the county. We drifted easily down the lake, the light wind following astern; but rowing back was another affair altogether. For the last hour or two the wind had been rising, and now it was in the teeth of a sou'-wester that we fought our slow way home. When we got back to the yacht we found the skipper looking dubiously at the sky. It was of no avail to tell him that the glass was rising. "They glesses," he said, contemptuously, "is no better than turnips. The best gless is the sun."

A multitude of sea birds too were gathering by the shore; the rocks were almost hidden by their snowy plumage. The meaning of their coming was plainer when we lay awake half the night to listen to the shrieking of the wind in the rigging, and hear the dull roar of the surf as it broke on distant reefs. And when the morning dawned cold and wet and stormy, a whole fleet of fishing boats, beaten back from the Lewis, put in for shelter to our quiet haven. As they passed us one by one we saw how their great lug-sails were drenched with spray; and the stalwart sea-kings, whose faces were as dark as the flapping canvas they were furling, glistened in their streaming oilskins. As the day went on, and still harder blew the gale, as still louder rose that hungry roar among the islands, there was small hope for them of making Stornoway. The weather was altogether too wild for fishing now, and on so rough a sea there was little pleasure in toiling at the oar.

But it was a jovial company that gathered round the table in the cabin. Many days like these must there be, unrecorded perhaps in his log-book, in the experience of every yachtsman—when every book has been read; when time-worn jokes are hailed with shouts of laughter; when the poorest puns pass current, and the very oldest stories are greeted with applause; days when the only occupations are eating, sleeping, and the rubber; the only exercise to tramp the sloppy deck in blinding rain; the only excitement to speculate on what there will be for dinner. Our food was running short too. The Stornoway boats had missed their catch of herrings. Bread had given place to biscuit. We contemplated with horror a still further descent to Stromness jam and the oatcakes of the country. "If this wind holds," observed the skipper gloomily, "we'll just have to die."

And when the gale did grow lighter, and one by one the herring boats spread broad, brown wings to get away, we looked doubtfully at the surf outside. There was still a bag of biscuits in the locker. The wind was dead against us still. We would wait awhile. Memories of beating round Cape Wrath were not forgotten.

> "We have had enough of action, and of motion we,
> Rolled to starboard, rolled to larboard, when the surge
> was seething free."



THE CRUISE OF THE THEKLA

III.—CALM AND STORM

WE left our moorings in Loch Laxford as the gale died fitfully away. We made our slow way southward down the rock-bound coast until the bold headland of Rhu Stoer stood clear cut on the horizon, and the bird-haunted cliffs of Handa lay, like a faint grey shadow, far astern. The hours dragged slowly by. Now the light breeze, ruffling the water with its fitful breath, filled for a space the swelling sails; and now the drooping ensign clung idly round the mast. Slowly with the ebbing tide we drifted along, down miles of barren coast line—low grey cliffs and heath-clad slopes, broken by rifts and gorges, with now and then the silver of some headlong fall; past the mouths of inlets with fringes of pale sand, clusters of brown huts like the kraals of Kaffir villages, and, far in, the outlines of wild hills.

And now the twilight glow was fading from the crags of Assynt; Canisp and Suilven were darkening on the sky. At length the shore grew dim and shadowy, hardly seen; then darkness settled down on sea and land.

Not a man of all the company had been into Loch Inver, and it was with anxious eyes that we watched for light or beacon that might guide our way. In vain we sought to pierce the blackness of the night. There was nothing but the faint outline of the shore, the low sound of the surf along the strand, the flicker of luminous waves round the feet of unseen islets. But at last the faint glimmer of a distant light was seen for a moment from the cross-trees; then another and another shone like welcome signals from the shore. And then in silence and in darkness we drifted to our moorings.

The morning broke wild and wet. Clouds hung dark above the mountains of Loch Inver.

> "There droops along the dreary hills a mournful fringe
> of rain."

It was a day of cold, and wet, and misery. There was a leak in the skylight, there was a cataract down the steps of the companion. But there was "a wind that followed fast." The Summer Islands, wrapped in cloud, were passed unseen. Through cold and clinging mists we crossed the waters of Loch Broom.

The clouds were breaking as we reached the shore at Gairloch. Sunlight smiled on the soft setting of green woodlands, on their crown of bare grey crags, on the barrier wall of Ben Slioch, rising far behind them.

And then before a stronger breeze, with the storm-jib up, with two reefs in the mainsail, and with the sea rushing along the scuppers, we left the point of Rona and the rugged lines of Skye, we rounded the headland of Rhu Ruagh, and, as night came down, dropped anchor in the upper reaches of Loch Torridon, under the shadow of the mountains.

It is a gloomy spot. The great, bare hills seem to darken half the sky, and among the few houses on its shore, there seems no mean between the stately hunting-lodge and the rude hovels of the miserable crofters.

We spent the evening on the shore, landing on a little beach among the drifted sea-wrack, where the waves had strewn soft-tinted scallop-shells, and bright echinus whose rich purple colouring seemed to glow among the olive weed. All along high-water mark some brilliant leaves had drawn a crimson line. The sandstone rocks lifted worn and weathered heads through a forest of bracken that the autumn sun had already touched with gold; while the fringe of birches standing round showed silvery stems through thin veils of dying leaves. We made our camp on the floor of a cavern which the waves had carved in the low cliff. No sound disturbed the solitude, save when at times the lazy sea lifted the long weed upon the threshold, or when a gnarled and stunted aspen rooted in a crevice overhead shivered in the evening air. Every chink in the dark hollow was hung with tiny ferns. Slabs of rock that had fallen from the roof were scored with ripple-marks —footprints on the sands of time that wind or wave, long ages since, left by the margin of some ancient sea. The blue smoke from our fire of driftwood crept slowly up the hill as if to join, round the far summit, the floating canopy of cloud. Regretfully we lingered on the shore, as the light of sunset, scattering for a space the dark mass of vapour, shone like a glory round the heads of giant mountains, and died in lines of crimson on the water. The great cliff wall across the loch seemed to draw near and menace us with sullen frown. A string of wild-fowl flying over startled us with the rush of shadowy wings. Then, like a signal of welcome, shone out against the sombre steep the sudden glimmer of the anchor-light.

It is pleasant to linger on white-letter days; on days when skies were blue and winds were fair; days of clear cold dawning crowned by sunset splendour; days of swift sailing down the Sound of Sleat, through the narrow reaches of Kyle Rhea, under sunlit steeps of Skye, with their warm flushes of heather, their sweeps of bright green fern, their tiny glens where, among feathery birches, flash down the rushing streams.

But no less fondly will the memory linger over the "Days of danger, nights of waking." He who in tranquil weather has anchored in Loch Hourn, who has watched the drifting cloud-shadows loiter along the calm brows of the mountains, has seen the green hills mirrored in the placid water, may well have wondered what cynic christened it the Lake of Hell. But when sudden tempests, rushing madly down the steep side of Ben Scrial, lash all the angry water into foam, and

> "—— lift it in their grasp
> And hold it up and shake it like a fleece,"

clearer then is the ominous meaning of its Gaelic name.

Along the beach, close above the golden weed that marks the tide line, stand the rude houses of the village; their dark, discoloured walls almost in unbroken line; their blackened thatch hardly varied by the masonry of a single chimney. Behind them rise their strips of corn land that seem to fight their way by inches up the sterile hills. The bare brown mountain is veined with milk-white torrents, vanishing at last in the caverns they have worn deep into the rock. One mist-like sheet of foam leaps in three mighty plunges into a great dark hollow; and, at times, the wind, rushing up the glen, catches the water as it falls, and hurls it backward up the hill in a white veil of spray.

Such was the scene, as late one August evening the *Thekla* sailed into the bay. Knowing the loose nature of the bottom and the consequent badness of the anchorage, we brought up a good hundred yards clear of any other craft, though a fleet of herring boats, that had brought in their takes of fish to smacks and steamers anchored in the bay, lay all around us. Clouds of sea-gulls hovered round the ships, or floated far up on the grey sky, their white wings wide against the rolling clouds.

Towards evening other boats put in for shelter, until the loch was crowded with craft.

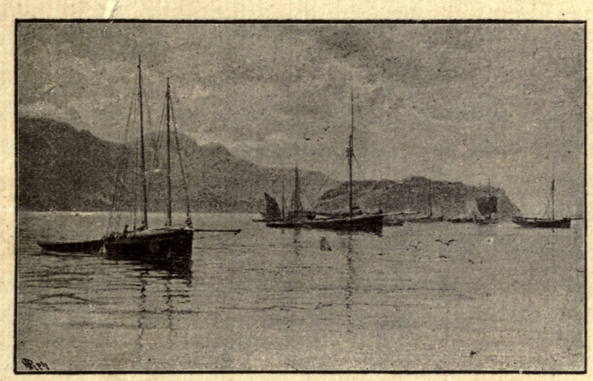
By nightfall the wind was blowing a whole gale. The air was full of driving rain. Sudden squalls struck the yacht with a distinct and solid shock that threatened to tear away her very masts. There were ominous signs, too, that the anchor was beginning to drag; when we went below at midnight the riding light of a yacht that lay astern seemed as we caught glimpses of it through the rain and spray, to be distinctly nearer than it was an hour ago.

Sleep in such a tumult and under such condition was not to be thought of. Three hours later, completely roused by shouts and clatter overhead, and a sudden crash against the stern, we hurried on deck.

The lights that glimmered through the blinding rain revealed clearly enough the cause of the disturbance. The schooner that last night lay a hundred yards behind us was grinding slowly along our starboard quarter. Her bowsprit had knocked away the crutch of our main boom, and now was threatening the stern of the gig. The davits were hastily swung in, and we got the boat on deck, guarding as best we could the sides of the yacht with fenders and boathooks.

High above us towered the schooner's masts, swaying wildly over our deck. One of her crew was clinging to the shrouds, bare headed, dressed just as he scrambled from his berth, careless of the rain. As a great roller lifted him high above us his cheery shout rang through the fury of the storm, "This is *grand!*" Then as in the trough of the wave the schooner sank down below the level of our decks, a flying sea swept over his dripping figure. Next moment there he was again, laughter in his eyes and a jest upon his lips.

Meanwhile two men were at work in the bow paying out more cable; rapidly we drifted clear of our dangerous neighbour; we let go a second anchor, and then we could breathe more freely. "Well," exclaimed the skipper, as he dashed away the water from his streaming face, "if this is Loch Hourn I don't want any more of it!"



THE MORNING AFTER.

But when the storm has died away, and over all the sea is rest and calm, when the light of sunrise stealing softly down the valley smiles on the stern faces of the mountains, turns the stubble-fields to sheets of gold, gleams on the level lake where half a hundred craft are floating on a silver sea, glances on the bright scales of fish that glitter in the nets, touches the white foam of leaping torrents, one might dream that wave and wind should never vex them more. The bright unclouded mountain looking down

> "—— sees the ocean to its bosom clasp
> The rocks and sea-sand with the kiss of peace."

THE FOOT OF SIABOD

Down a great hollow in the hills, under banks that are hung with ferns and lingering foxgloves, with goldenrod and harebells, and all the flowers of the late summer, rushes a swift mountain stream. Here it chafes among boulders that were shaped and rounded and, it may be, strewn here by the glaciers that have left their mark along the wall; now it loiters through a silver lake set round with reeds and lilies, the haunt of the wild duck and the heron; and now it plunges headlong over a rocky steep beneath a white mist of foam. Its troubled waters bear no barges to the sea; no mill-wheel flashes in its whirling stream—a turbulent, untamed, headstrong river.

In the brief harvest weather, when the hay was down on the meadow by its shore, the dwindling torrent sank into its channel until the broken threads of silver seemed to creep along among the boulders as if fearing to be seen. Bars of grey shingle checked its feeble flow. The trout were crowded in its clear, still pools.

Then one night there came a lurid sunset, an angry sky, long plumes of ominous cloud. The morning dawned in stainless splendour, a sunrise of promise all too fair. Clouds began to settle on the crest of Siabod. Masses of grey vapour rolling down broke in great sheets of rain that stalked like phantoms through the valley. All day the tempest grew.

Each rivulet along the mountain side swells into an angry torrent, and from the cliff that overhangs the hollow once more "the wild cataract leaps in glory." And now, exulting in the added strength of all its hundred turbulent vassals, the river rises in its might. The old stepping-stones are knee-deep under a rushing flood. Over giant boulders, seething and struggling, roars the furious stream. And when at last the stormy night comes down the river has risen to its very brim. Still falls the rain. All night long there rises louder still the cry of the river, and when morning breaks, the floods are out on all the level shore. High above unseen boulders the white horses are rushing to the sea. The great fall below the bridge is one huge mass of roaring, boiling, plunging water. The sun is bright on all the landscape, on the vivid green of new-mown fields, on snowy heaps of drifting foam. But the hay that was lying in the meadows is whirling with the merciless stream or trailing sadly in the broken reeds.

Ill fares it now with all the children of the river. Along the shore the sandpiper flits with mournful note, and looks in vain for her haunt among the shingle. The martins in the river bank peer anxiously out at the flood that foams so perilously near their sandy thresholds. Up and down the stream the restless dipper sails on swift dark wings; and the kingfisher, with flight more rapid still, flashes through the rainbow floating in the spray below the fall as if to challenge with his own rare beauty the very hues of heaven.

On the hills above few birds are seen at any time. Wheatears there are upon the rocky slopes low down, smart stonechats flit from point to point among the furze uttering the clear incisive call-notes that have given them their name. But the tenants of the mountain solitudes are, for the most part, bandits born. Far over the waste wanders the carrion crow, his harsh voice and sombre plumage harmonising well. A rarer sound is the hoarse croak of the raven, but the grouse know well the ominous sound, and as his shadow passes crouch closer in the honey-scented ling whose softer tone follows the rich Tyrian of the now fading heather. Round the crags of Siabod drifts the soaring buzzard, now wheeling in wide circles, and now swooping with closed wings a hundred feet sheer down, opening his great pinions for a moment to steady himself before the final plunge. Less often a merlin crosses the windy moor. His is a dainty figure, and his smooth soaring flight suggests rather a swallow than a falcon.

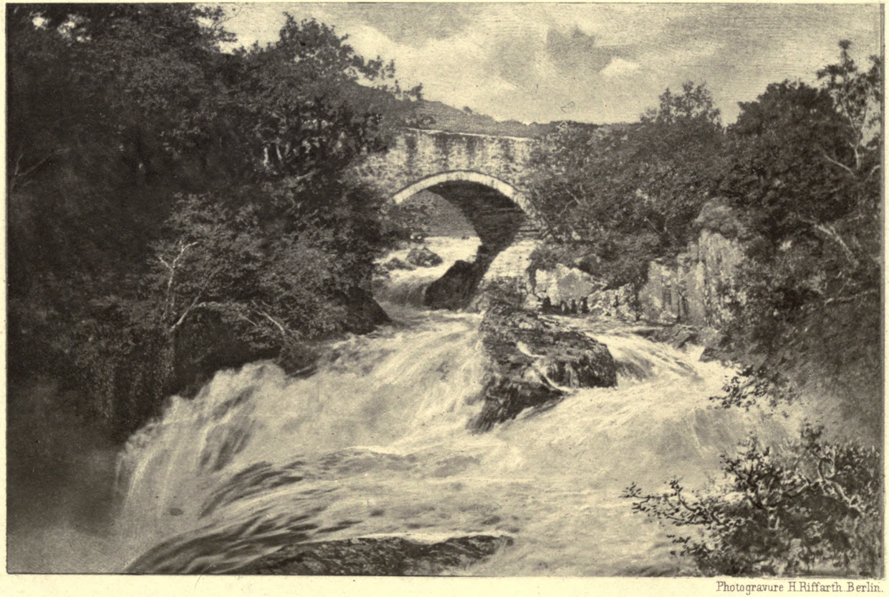
But this wide arena, with its cliffs and woods, its meadows and its river, is the haunt of many shy children of the air. Among the crags that crown the broad oak woodland rising from the river, along whose dizzy ledges clamber lightly the sure-footed mountain goats, the rock-dove comes back to roost at nightfall. Among the ancient trees below, stockdove and ringdove croon softly in the gloaming. Here in the green depths the clamorous woodpeckers shout to each other through long summer days prophesying of the coming rain. There are no starlings here to dispossess them. The hole in yonder tree is an ancestral homestead, with threshold worn and polished as by the use of many generations. The birds themselves have vanished at the stir of footsteps on the leaves, but on the dead branches of this dying oak are signs of their late presence—scars cut deep into the old tree, loose sheets of bark their beaks have torn away.

But of all birds that love this quiet spot the dipper is the genius of the stream. Each bend is his familiar haunt. There at all hours you will meet him. Sometimes, coming unaware upon the angler, he hails with startled cry the invader of his realm. Sometimes he waits to watch with bright bold eyes movements that suggest no thought of danger. The fisherman who has right knowledge of his craft regards the dipper as a friend and brother. Conscious that the active little diver has no stain of guilt upon his soul, he loves its graceful ways, the music of its cry, its very presence on the river.

On a rock in the mid-stream the dipper stands. As he looks away up the river his form alone is seen against the rock, hung as it is with dripping moss and dark with the plash of the water. A moment only he stands quiet; then diving into the very swiftest rush of the current, he comes up a few seconds later on another resting-place with something in his beak—some caddis or shellfish that he has found among the stones. How he contrives to make his way so easily beneath the surface is still a matter of dispute. It is considered by some naturalists as proved that the dipper actually walks along, clutching with his feet the stones upon the bottom. But some anglers who have watched him well maintain that he only swims under the water like a dab-chick or a rail. The dipper leaves his perch again, swimming like a tiny copy of a moorhen across a belt of smoother water. Diving again and again, sometimes resting on a stone below the surface, half his body still submerged, sometimes taking refuge on a boulder high and dry above the stream, at length he settles on another rock, crouching down as if for quiet meditation. But now from under the bank flies out a comrade in pursuit. The drowsing figure on the stone wakens instantly to life. Before the new-comer can reach him he is off, and a second later has gone under with a splash. When he comes up, a few yards away, the two birds roll over and over and splash and frolic like a pair of sparrows on the dusty highway.

Tired at length, one player flies swiftly up the stream. The other swims across to a quiet backwater under the shore, where, upon a stone in the dark shadow of the alder bushes, he stands long motionless, his white breast mirrored in a quivering band of light like the image of a sinking moon lengthened on a rippling sea.

And when at length the dipper is asleep in his hollow in the bank; when laughing woodpeckers are silent, and the jays no longer wrangle in the willows; when the monarch of mountains is dark upon the twilight sky, wrapped in the rich purple of his royal mantle; when the martins, descending from their hover in the air, have gone to rest beneath the eaves, then the curlews flying over, mere dots of black upon the pallid blue, call softly as they pass. And when the mountains are all black against the face of night, when mists like gliding phantoms are swaying in the meadows, and the cry of the river is sounding in the silent air, are heard the solemn voices of the owls. Far off among the trees a solitary bird is calling to his fellows, and now, as from some lonely elf out of the dark, comes back the answer, a faint soft musical halloo.



Photogravure H. Riffarth. Berlin.

THE CYFING FALLS
CAPEL CURIG

IN THE MOUNTAINS

BELOW the falls, where the vexed water, quiet for a space, sweeps down with calmer flow, a mountain torrent joins the brimming river. It is a headlong stream, no gentle "nurse of rushes and of reeds." Through a green glen, worn deep into the mountain side, it laughs and dances, and leaps lightly down, a free, unfettered spirit of the hills.

A slight pathway through the wood, a track trodden only by the loitering angler or by the black cattle descending from the uplands, wanders in and out among the thickets, climbing the steep slope along the stream. The bed of the torrent is piled with great boulders, their smooth sides overgrown with lichen, and, where the water laps their cool shadows, thick with moss and fern. In the wreck of leaves and branches that winter spates have strewn among the crannies, a hundred plants have found a footing, brightening with their mingled tints the cold grey of the stones. Pale blue scabious and purple centaury, yellow hawkweed and white meadow-sweet, slender harebell and tall angelica, spread their roots among the mossy draperies. The golden petals of the globe-flowers have long since fallen away, but there is a very forest of their leaves among the mountain-fern that fringes all the shore.

Grey and wrinkled, as by time and tempest, are the oaks that bear up the green roof of the glade. The rowan-trees, with roots like talons clutching the battered rocks, are not yet plundered of their coral clusters, for birds do not greatly love the shadows of this solitary glen. The white stems of the birches, whose trembling leafage mingles with the green mist overhead, seem to stand among their bolder brothers like the dryads of the valley. So steep is the ravine that the torrent here is little but a chain of pools and cataracts; now a hollow worn into the living rock, where the sturdy trout just hold their own in the rush of the current, now a fall that gleams among the trees like the white form, "the substance of a happy dream" that feasted the glad eyes of Rhœcus in that haunted vale of Thessaly.

So deep is the still hollow that the voice of the great river rushing through the valley, near and yet unseen, seems faint and distant, and like the murmur of the summer sea. But when

"—— a sudden rush of air
Flutters the lazy leaves o'erhead,
And gleams of sunshine toss and flare
Like torches down the path I tread"

the swelling sound is borne upward like the roar of the tide upon an ocean beach, or the stir of storm-wind in the pines.

A fringe of birches bars the way upward from the valley. In the wet earth about their roots, the plants of the moorland, the outposts of the higher regions mingle with the children of the wood. Yellow spikes of asphodel shine in the rank grass. Sprays of dainty marsh plants hang pale blue bells over the stream. In corners of black bogland, the grass of Parnassus gleams star-like in its peerless beauty. And here the sundew folds in its deadly leaves the insects that sip its fatal sweetness.

Higher up there is no canopy of foliage above the brook, but among its alder thickets the meadow-sweet grows tall and strong, and all along the shore the bog-myrtle, crushed under careless footsteps, answers meekly with the fragrance of its leaves.

The channel which the stream has carved itself, deep in the black earth of the moor, is marked by wandering lines of rushes with here and there a few white plumes of cotton grass, all the way up to its birthplace in the mountains, a quiet lake that lies unseen behind a shoulder of the hill.

It is a bare, unsheltered tarn. No trees lean over it; there is no fringe of alder even round its still dark water. But over the wide hollow is a dense growth of bracken, whose fronds already under the warm touch of autumn "are turning yellow, or kindling into red." There is a warm flush of ling upon its rocky islets, to whose sovereign purple the gorse adds the crowning touch of gold. Two herons fishing by the shore, rise long before their still forms were seen against the grey rocks, and drift silently away. In the shallows there are lines of tall rushes, whose thin veil hardly hides a string of teal, keeping close together, quiet and motionless as if hoping to escape unseen. Reluctantly they rise at length, making sweet music with their wings. They fly up the tarn to the far end, thence once back, and then away into the hills to join, in some remoter solitude, their sober-clad companions.

Even in this desolate spot there are signs of man's dominion. Across the swampy ground are the lines of ancient fields. A few broad stones not yet swallowed up in the oozy soil, are the relics of a causeway over the morass to a rocky brow under the hill where stand the ruins of a homestead.

His was a dire extremity who sought to claim this hopeless wilderness. Long years have passed since the effort was abandoned. The walls, piled rudely of huge blocks of stone, are standing in their simple strength; but the broken rafters are scattered on the floor, and under the fallen tiles the lizard and the field-mouse creep for shelter. Rushes and nettles, bramble and foxglove, hide with their green tapestries the "chinks that time has made." Some bird has built its nest in the old chimney, and on the hearth, whose generous glow has mocked it may be many a time the blasts that shook the walls, moulder the rusty bars.

That a wren has built within the doorway, proves how completely man's presence is forgotten; but a robin singing blithely on the broken sill seems like a link with forgotten tenants. Where hung the garden gate grows a great elder tree, betraying by the wrinkles in its bark how long it is since yonder fruit trees, heavy with their sour, green load, have felt the gardener's steel. Grass has covered every sign of tillage, the heather returning from the mountain blooms unchecked in every clearing. Some signs there are that speak more plainly of the past. In the brook that runs beside the doorway still lies a broken pitcher; and in the bark of an old sycamore, whose clusters of red keys light up its sober summer green, is carved with "the touch of a vanished hand" one letter of a name.

Across the moorland, by the margin of the stream, a party of anglers are making their camp. Picturesque figures are gathering armfuls of half-burnt heather, and a stalwart fisherman is arranging with stones a draught for the little hearth—a touch of wood-craft suggestive of more real camp life and the sober earnest of "the bush." Two girls are rummaging in bags and baskets for the materials of the meal. And now the fire is lit, the kettle hung. The blue smoke rising slowly trails far along the hills.

It is a jovial party that gathers to the feast. The solitude is startled by staves of song and shouts of laughter, and the pleasant voices of girls.

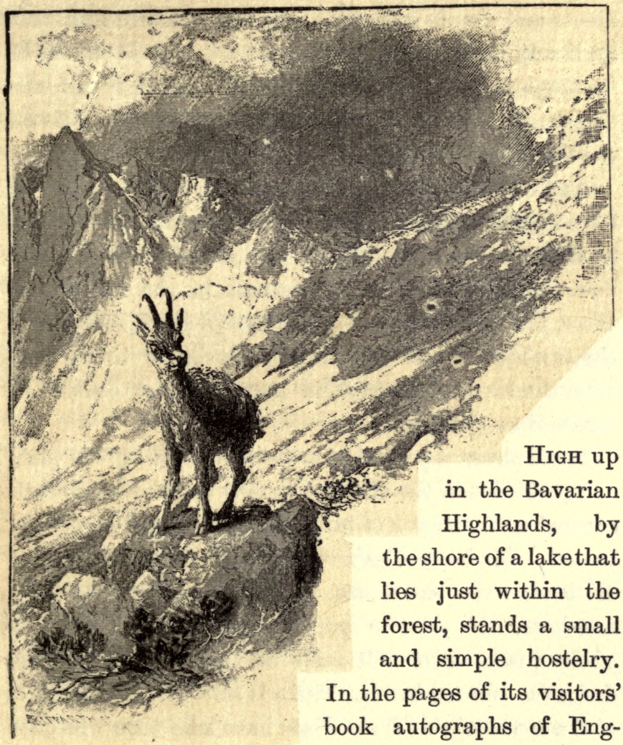
Is it an inborn yearning for the far-off days of savage life, or is it the mere relief at freedom from the fret of civilisation that lends so real a charm to a bivouac like this, and throws a glamour even over its discomforts? Perhaps it is rather the long day in the open, the scrambling over slippery boulders that makes a man content to drink his tea out of the kettle lid, to share the single knife that is handed round among the company, to regard even a failure in the supply of butter as only a fresh material for a jest.

The eye wanders away from the little scene of life and movement, from the warm touches of colour and the drifting smoke of the camp fire, across the sullen bog land, to the sterile hills. Over the rim of the vast hollow rise range after range of dim outlines, shrouded in grey mist. At times the veil is lifted for a moment, far gleams of sunlight strike on steep mountain sides, and glitter on the still faces of tarns that sleep in hollows of the hills. There is silence everywhere, save for the fitful breath of wind that lightly stirs the rushes of the tufted grass upon the long, low walls.

Far up on the grey sky a troop of gulls are wheeling, their wide wings hardly trembling as they soar in vast circles overhead. There is a sound of the sea in their wild voices, a sound that, like the faint call-note of some wandering plover, seems but to deepen the sense of solitude and gloom. But now through a rift in the grey curtain shows the great mass of Snowdon, dark on the glowing sky. A gleam of sunlight silvers the long lakes lying at his feet; soft hues of purple trace the outlines of each mighty peak, linger on the great pyramid of Crib Goch, the stupendous precipice of Llwydd, on Y Wyddfa's sovereign head.

> "The fascination and allure
> Of the sweet landscape chains the will,
> The traveller lingers on the hill,
> His parted lips are breathing still
> The last sigh of the Moor."

A CHAMOIS



HIGH up in the Bavarian Highlands, by the shore of a lake that lies just within the forest, stands a small and simple hostelry. In the pages of its visitors' book autographs of Englishmen are few and far between. It is still beyond the postal delivery, and letters, which are brought whenever an opportunity may chance to present itself, are often five days on the way from England.

But to the man who is not too closely wedded to the ways of civilised life the settlement and its surroundings offer attractions of no mean order. Primitive as are the customs of this little hostel, though rough its appointments and simple its cuisine, the traveller will find that he is waited on by the jovial landlord, one or other of his laughing daughters, and the handsome gipsy girl who helps them with an attention that would reflect credit on the first hotel in Europe.

And in the forest that stretches round the lake and far across the Austrian border he may stalk the roebuck by its favourite pool, or the tall red deer that comes down in the dusk from its fastness in the mountains. Here, too, the chamois is on his native heath, and of all the trophies of the hunter none is dearer to his soul than the black and wrinkled horns of that fleetfooted mountain antelope.

It is a pleasant path that crosses the broad green plain—a path that in the summer time is bright with flowers, cheered with the stir of birds and the hum of myriad insects. No butterflies now loiter in the scented grass. No locusts rise on crimson wings as we cross the sunny meadows. No more in quiet corners sounds the piping of the quail. The chill rains of October are bringing down the painted leaves. There is snow along the ledges of the mountains. Their crests have long been whitened with a touch of winter.

We linger on the bridge of pine-logs over the green waves of a torrent rushing down to meet the Isar, and look back across broad level lands that stretch away to the feet of distant mountains. Plain to see through the dwindling foliage of the limes that rain and sun have robbed of their summer glory are the broad-eaved gables of houses that cluster round white towers of village churches.

Far beyond, half way up the mountain side, pausing as if for rest, shows among sheltering trees a straggling white-walled monastery of Benedictine friars. In dark recesses of the glen behind it linger the spirits banished by the founders of the settlement. Still, on wild nights in winter the shuddering peasant, hurrying homeward in the darkness, hears their voices in the pauses of the storm.

But soon the winding of the path shuts out all sign of human presence. Tall pines, the outposts of the forest, are marshalled by the way, and in their shadow piles of rock, overgrown with wandering clematis, green with fern and grey with lichen, are strewn on either hand. The mountain wall, rising in front like a vast barrier, is drawn in bold outlines on the glowing sky. One more turning brings in sight the little Highland inn.

The inn is a picture in itself, with its broad eaves and its balconies, its shingle roof weighted with huge stones, the rich brown of its unpainted woodwork, and the forest pines behind it like a splendid setting. No one is visible at door or window, but from within rise sounds of revelry, shouts and the stamp of feet; and clearly heard above the din, the plaintive twanging of a zither.

We pause a moment in the doorway to watch through the smoke that fills the room the wild figures of the revellers and the uncouth movements of the dance. They are men, all of them, each one dancing alone, stamping now and then and shouting, and clapping broad and horny hands. Seated at a table in the corner, a strolling player with olive cheeks and dark moustache bends lovingly above his instrument. Beside him stands a bright-eyed girl, whose coloured kerchief, snowy sleeves and silver ornaments give finishing touches to the picture. A plaintive song she sings, a song of home, a note that ever finds an answering echo in the heart of the wandering Bavarian. The rugged mountaineers, whose senses now are perhaps a little clouded by the potent spirit of the Highlands, lend their deep voices to the chorus.

Suddenly a swarthy reveller, catching sight of strangers in the doorway, comes forward with eager gestures of welcome. His speech is thick, and the dialect is strange to us, but there is no doubt at all about the meaning. It is

"Will you come and join the dance?
Will you, won't you, will you, won't you, won't you
join the dance?"

As the zither player pauses to look up, a tall figure at his side sets down on the table his unfinished tankard, takes his rifle from the wall, his hat from the deer's antler overhead, and comes out to greet us with a smile of recognition on his weather-beaten face. Time has turned to snow the sable of his long moustache; but the forester's hand is as steady now, his eye as keen to-day as when in the last charge at Königgrätz a Prussian sabre left that mark across his cheek.

As we left the house and strolled down to the lake, he told us we had come at the best of moments. Yes, it was late in the season, but no one else had a permit, and he knew where a fine Gamsbock, as he called it, came down at dawn to feed below the larches. We would start at once. The sun was hardly down. We could reach the hut in the mountains before midnight, and begin the chase at daybreak.

A strange-looking craft awaited us by the shore, with square ends and straight sides, and no vestige of a curve anywhere in its blackened timbers. We felt as we put off that our dress was not in keeping with the old canoe. We should have been brave with wampum and with warpaint, with feathers of the great war-eagle. The picturesque equipment of the forester presented a better harmony—his braided jacket, his green hat with its silver tassels and its blackcock's plume, and the carving on the stock of the rifle resting near him as he rowed. Swiftly we glided along the lake, over cloud and forest and mountain copied in the tranquil depths. A strip of vivid green ran all along above the rocky shore. Over it rose dark ranks of pines, sombre and cold, in endless, motionless array. By the farther shore two girls were rowing homeward with grass from a clearing in the forest. Keeping time with the swift strokes of their paddles floated across the water the faint sounds of a song.

The notes grew fainter, and were lost. There was no sound along the shore. No nutcrackers wrangling in the tree-tops, no tits swinging on the long brown cones, no buzzard on the solitary sky.

At last the boat grated on the shingle, and we filed into the shadows of the forest.

Few tenants are there of these gloomy depths. Roebuck rarely venture so far down. Stags seldom leave their higher haunts unless to harry the green crops of some solitary homestead. It is long since the last bear was killed on this side the frontier. Under the broad eaves of one of the houses in the village below hangs still the trophy of the chase. Seventy years the bare and grinning skull has mouldered on the wall.

We followed through the forest the footsteps of our silent leader, crossed belts of straggling pines, stumbling over unseen boulders, scrambling up slippery steeps of rock. So dark was it when we reached the hut that we had to feel for the door.

It was a cosy nook. Behind it towered a sheltering wall of rock; on either side stood groups of pines, ghost-like in the gloom. In the dim valley, three thousand feet below us, a light was twinkling in some distant village: a far-off belfry sounded the midnight hour.

Round the red pine logs on the open hearth we slept that night the hunter's sleep, and when the forester roused us from our lair among the hay, the sky was brightening to the dawn.

We made a hasty meal. No fire was kindled now, lest we should warn the chamois of our coming. We took our weapons from the wall, and silently we left the hut.

The scent of pines is sweet in the cool morning air; the dew lies heavy on alpenrose and holly-fern. We make for a clump of larches that have gathered round the crest of a steep crag, and have barely reached their shelter when suddenly we hear a sound that quickens every pulse and tightens each man's grip upon his rifle. It is the whistle of the chamois. The forester signs to us to wait while he creeps forward to reconnoitre.

How plainly in the breathless stillness sounds the roar of the torrent, how clear among the pines below the cry of a solitary woodpecker, how loud the cowbell on some distant alp!

The forester lifts his hand. One after one we reach his side, and there, two hundred yards away, the chamois is standing on the slope. He is looking hard this way. His black horns are clear against the rock behind him. The light of sunrise is warm upon his rich brown coat. Defiantly his head is lifted, as he utters now and then his impatient cry of anger and suspicion. Slowly he walks across the rocky slope. He pauses for a longer, keener look—a fatal pause for him. For then there is the sharp crack of a rifle. The bullet has found its billet and the buck is lying lifeless on the scree.

The sun that at that very moment rose in cloudless splendour above the purple mountains came too late for him. Those bold, black eyes will look no more upon the face of dawn. The east was lighted with a soft and tender glow. Far down the valley of the Inn the distant ranges showed like banks of cloud. At our feet

> "Grey mists were rolling, rising, vanishing;
> The woodlands glistened with their jewelled crowns;
> Far off the mellow bells began to ring
> For matins in the half-awakened towns."

ON DARTMOOR

A STUDY IN GREY

UNLIKE the birds, who for the most part retire to rest at nightfall, some of them even before the sun goes down, the beasts that figure on our scanty list are mostly lovers of the dark. We may indeed find, at any hour, a squirrel in the tree-tops; and the shrews, although they love the twilight, are heard all day in the wood and hedgerow. But the stoat and weasel hide under cover of the night their deeds of darkness. It is only in the gloaming that the otter is out by the river. It is when all is still that the fox levies blackmail upon the poultry-yard, sometimes slaughtering, as if from mere lust of murder, ten times as much as he can carry off. Even the tall red deer comes out of the forest at the dead of night to plunder the garden of the cottager, or to make havoc of the springing corn.

These are figures familiar more or less to many dwellers in the country. But there is another night-rover who, though more plentiful than the otter, and ready to make a home in any spot where a fox could find safe cover, is less generally known than either. Unlike them, the badger plays a part no more in any phase of sport. He is less often seen by daylight even than the fox. His habits hide him altogether from the general view. With his powerful claws he digs himself a dwelling in the ground, in some quiet and secluded spot, in the depths of a wood or in some rocky hollow in the moor. Cave-hunters find his long foot-prints in the black earth on cavern floors, though not all have been so fortunate as Boyd Dawkins, who watched by the glimmer of his candles the shy beasts running off to hide in still darker corners of the cave.

But, though comparatively seldom seen, the badger is by no means rare. It is known to inhabit suitable spots in more than half the counties of England, and is widely scattered through the sister kingdoms. So old an inhabitant is he that his ancestors must have been familiar even with the mammoth. His name, in its still-used provincial form of *Brock*, has left its mark on many an English country side. Such names as Brockley, Brockhampton, Brockendale are found throughout the country.

With the keeper and the farmer, the badger has received—it were not fair to him to say that he has earned—a reputation little better than that of fox or polecat. It is not to be expected that he would go out of his way to avoid a nestful of eggs, a sitting pheasant, or a brood of young partridges that he may chance to stumble on in his nightly wanderings. That he does at times commit himself in this way there is proof enough. He has a weakness for young rabbits, which he will dig for in the warren.

But he is satisfied in the main with humbler fare. The fruits of the earth—acorns, roots, beech-mast—serve his turn, with worms and mice and beetles. He is partial to wasp-grubs, and it is said that no wasps' nest will long remain unharried in a place which badgers haunt. A captive badger will kill and eat a snake, and has been known to exhibit an amount of skill in handling a viper that suggested previous practice, though as the badger comes out only in the dusk, and daylight never finds him willingly outside his holt, he can hardly be very familiar with such lovers of the sun as the grass snake or the adder.

On the upper reaches of the Dart, among the woods that clothe the sides of the broad glen which that rushing river has carved among the hills, are haunts after the badger's heart.

Who crosses by the road alone the wide expanse of Dartmoor has yet much to learn of its beauty. There is indeed a charm in the very wildness of its open landscapes; in the bare brown slopes that rise and fall for miles on every hand, here relieved by the bright green of swampy hollows, there broken by the rugged outlines of the tors that lift at far intervals their granite crowns. There is a splendour that passes the painting of mere words in the glory of its autumn colouring, the purple of its miles of heather, the gold of its broad sheets of gorse. But, full of beauty as is undeniably the open moorland, the wide hollow where the Dart goes whirling down, ranks high among the fairest spots of Devon, and it is no idle boast to say that there is little finer river scenery in England.

Dartmoor weather has a reputation somewhat doubtful. The very name is held suggestive of the realm of rain and mist. Even Devon folk have an ill word for it:

"West wind always brings wet weather;
East wind wet and cool together.
South wind surely brings the rain,
North wind blows it back again."

But there is no corner on the Dart like those God-forsaken wastes on Exmoor where the year is made of nine months' winter and three months' rain; where the hay is dried by steam power, and where three fine days in a fortnight make an epoch to be talked of all the season. But even when the east blows keen across the moor the sun is warm along the river. The wooded winding shores are peopled by a different race from the moorland wilderness above.

In a clearing among the bushes, a sort of no-man's land, at a corner of a covert, stood the keeper and his men. The ground before them was broken up with the mounds and burrows of a colony of badgers, and the implements carried by the men—a pickaxe and a spade, a portentous pair of tongs, and a sack—suggested that an assault was contemplated on the holt.

The keeper was not in a mood to listen to any arguments as to the harmlessness of badgers. He was respectful, but he shook his head. All he knew was that a hen pheasant had been killed upon her nest, and all the eggs eaten, and that the prints of badgers' feet were plain on the soft earth all round the spot, and turn them out he would.

One man there was in the little company who used no spade, and carried nothing but two crooked sticks with whose help he limped along. But if he brought no hunting gear he contributed his unrivalled skill of wood craft. No chase within cry of the river from Ashburton to Hexworthy could prosper without him. No man can fairly say he knows the river who has not fished it with that veteran angler. The best of dogs would be of little use if Bill Mann were not near upon his shaggy steed to show the favourite covert of the "black'ock." And now, with his short black clay between his lips, he sat down to take command.

Two small terriers, put into one of the many holes, were hardly underground when a fox dashed out from one of the entrances and vanished in the thickets. Such companionship seems not uncommon. Several instances have been recorded in which fox and badger were content to occupy apartments in the same earth.

The barking of the dogs, faintly heard from underfoot, gave evidence of other game. The men put their ears on the ground and listened. The keeper said he could hear a badger. Bill declared he could smell it. For some time the men could not tell where to dig. Now the barking and scuffling was to this side, now to that. When at last it settled down in one spot, pick and spade made short work of digging down into the burrow. And when at length, through the roof thus broken in, the grey coat of the badger stood revealed, came the old man's turn. Catching up the tongs, he gripped the struggling beast and hauled him out. The keeper seized him ignominiously by the tail, dropped him head first into the sack, tied him up, and laid him on one side.

The dogs were rather indignant at being thus cheated of their prey, and were with difficulty dissuaded from trying to worry it through the sack. When they presently entered the holt from another side fresh sounds of conflict soon announced that it was not empty yet. Next moment out rushed another badger, all brown from earth he had been digging to get away from his pursuers. Dismayed perhaps by the circle of his foes and by the shouts that greeted his appearance, he paused a moment, then pulled himself together, and ran for his life.

There is a strange idea still current that the legs of a badger are longer on one side of the body than on the other, "so that he may run better along the side of a hill." It has been stated too that he is not fleet of foot. This one at any rate ran like a wild cat.

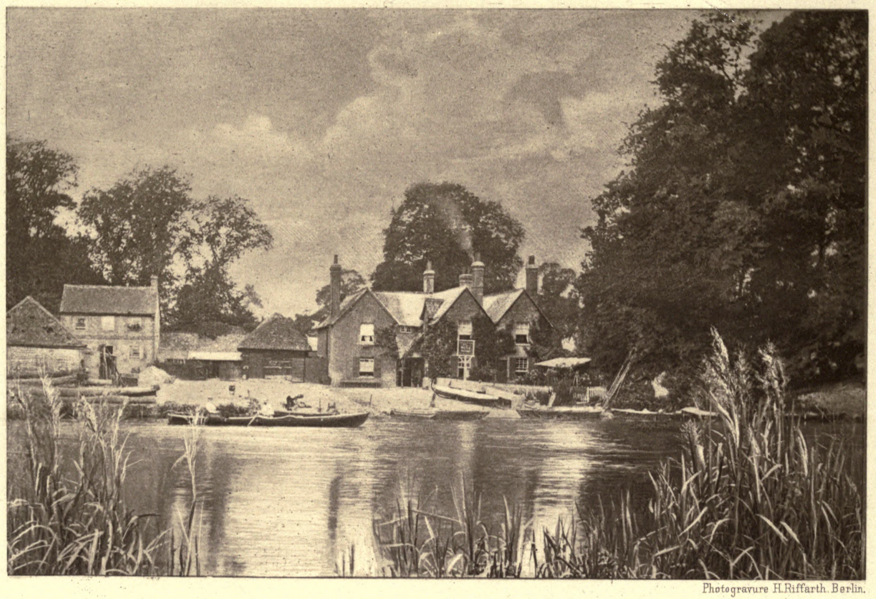
The dogs were out of the hole and away in full cry. The posse of hunters, bringing spade and pickaxe, and not forgetting the captive in the sack, followed in hot pursuit. Right across the woodland crashed the shouting chase, careless of ivy trails that lay in wait for luckless feet, brambles ready to hold a man helpless by the waist, tall saplings that slapped him cruelly in the face.

But nobody cared if he did leave part of his coat or even a scrap of his skin hanging on a casual thorn. The stalwart keeper following hard after the dogs, discovered speedily where the fugitive had gone to holt. It was a more awkward place to get at than before from the presence of a tough tree root in the bank, and the old man had limped leisurely up to the spot before the beast was caught. Caught it was at last, however, and badger number two shared the fate—and the sack—of badger number one. Slowly the little procession moved away; the bag with the badgers in it slung on a pole between two keepers, like the grapes that came from Eshcol.

THREE MEN IN A TUB

Many a man whose brief holiday is marred by summer rain is tempted to bestow a hearty malediction on the idle promise of St. Swithin. But for the oarsman who for weeks has been looking forward to his few days of hard-earned leisure on the river, there is nothing in the dictionary to paint in proper language his disgust at the unspeakable season. None feels more keenly than he the misery of long days of rain. There is no man who knows better the full value of those rare gleams of glorious weather that, when they come, make life well worth the living.

At least, that is your opinion when all the signs are fair, when the glass is going up, and the sky is full of promise. The cumbrous costume of the City is cheerfully discarded. In an easy dress of flannel, untrammelled by cuffs or collar, or the crowning abomination of a tall, silk hat, you are standing by the river. The skiff is all ready, taut and trim. With a fine show of indifference you take your seat upon the thwart, but you cannot for



Photogravure H. Riffarth. Berlin.

THE BEETLE AND WEDGE.
MOULSFORD.

the life of you resist a thrill of pleasure as once more your fingers tighten on the sculls.

You are alone. You will pick up your less fortunate comrades farther on. They cannot get away so soon. And as in the late afternoon you pull easily down the noble stream, all thoughts of the steady-going, money-making, work-a-day world seem to vanish into air. At every turn you are reminded of some happy memory. You begin to breathe again the free life of the river. You smile as you recall its bygone hours of song and mirth and laughter. How pleasant over the tall fringe of reeds are the glimpses of old-world villages seen across their level fields—their roofs of brown thatch, their quaint church towers, the smoke of their evening fires blue against their noble trees! How fair the low green meadows, newly mown, with a suspicion of hay still lingering on the hedges where the great waggons have rumbled down the lane!

From the tall elms along the shore float the soft voices of the doves; and, as you drift down with noiseless oar, your presence hardly startles the little troops of moorhens paddling leisurely across the stream. You see the brown leaves of weed under the clear cool water sway softly as you pass. You watch the sand-martins dip by hundreds in the tranquil river. You see the wild-duck drifting over, dark against the glowing sky; you hear the night-jar churring among the beeches on the hill. It is a perfect evening. No breath of wind is stirring in the reeds. Quiet sky, warm air, peaceful river.

Then, as the sweet breath of the lime-trees grows stronger in the twilight, you pass the house-boats at their moorings, near the well-remembered village, and put in where the long bridge crosses the wide river, and where the old hostel invites the oarsmen to its pleasant shelter. As you make fast your skiff among the crowd of boats that spread out like a fan into the stream, your name is shouted from the shore. Yes, your fellow-voyagers of the morrow are among the group of idlers round the doorway.

How easily the "river man" flings off the trammels of his ordinary garb! But yesterday he was in the City, in coat of faultless cut, with unimpeachable hat, and the very correctest of ties. Behold him now a stalwart oarsman, disguised in flannels and a 'varsity cap, a short pipe in his mouth, and no hint about him anywhere to tell that only last night he threw down the pen or shut up the ledger. But it is hard to leave the world altogether unremembered. Perhaps even now he is wandering away in fancy from the river, and the boats, and the pleasant scene before him, to reflect on the state of the market, to think with a touch of uneasiness of that venture in tea, or to meditate on fluctuations in diamonds. That figure, now, in the very oldest of coats and most untidy of caps may even be a schoolmaster, who has left those few sheep in the wilderness, and has managed somehow to snatch this brief respite from his toil.

The group breaks up. One by one the idlers quit the doorway and find their billets in the cosy inn. Silence long delayed settles down at length upon the sleepers whose hard-won rest is unbroken by the rush of the weir, the song of the sedge-bird in the reeds across the river, or the cries of wild fowl abroad under cover of the darkness.

The morning is bright and promising—too bright, the ancient mariner says, who throws the painter into the bow and pushes you off. But you make light of his warnings. You still have faith in St. Swithin. You mean to have a good time of it.

It is a very crowd of butterflies that the sun has tempted out. 'Varsity men in fearful and wonderful get up—though not always quite successful in the handling of their sculls—are assisted by admiring crews of "their sisters and their cousins and their"—well, no, on reflection, perhaps they draw the line at "aunts"—in all the splendour of the rainbow.

But, alas! the clouds gather darkly from the southward. It is not long before the croak of the ancient mariner seems likely to prove well-founded. A few large drops patter ominously among the willows by the shore. The drops become a shower, the shower becomes a pelt. Well now for those who have loitered among the lilies, have stopped to explore the backwaters, have no lock to wait for, and are back before the rain has settled to its work in earnest.

It is some compensation for the unwelcome interruption of the storm to watch from the safe shelter of the inn the half-drowned boatloads pulling for the shore. Some are far up the river. The willows, whose grey leaves serve well enough to screen a crew of two from the inquisitive gaze of the world, or even as a shelter in a moderate shower, are of no service now. Alas, now, for the gay plumage of the morning! This is a deluge against which no wrap or mackintosh is proof, and it is in but sorry plight that the fair argonauts are helped ashore. Some of them contemplate ruefully the havoc that the rain has wrought upon their finery. The sunshine has faded from their lips, the laughter from their eyes; but they take their ill-fortune bravely for the most part, making as light of their drenched garments as the oarsmen who are handing them ashore. The crowd of draggled pleasure-seekers vanishes hastily into the recesses of the inn, to reappear later in strange habiliments borrowed from the landlord or his daughters.

The resources of a riverside hostel, in the rain, are apt to be limited. Even the consolation of a pipe is denied. The very smoking-room is needed for the entertainment of unexpected guests who to-day have been washed into the inn, and you and your comrades are driven finally to make a bolt into the summer-house. Even here a dejected couple of campers out, who have abandoned in despair their shelterless tent, are preparing to make a night of it, and there is nothing for it but another bolt for bed.

In the morning the world wears quite another face. From the look of things you would say there had been no rain for weeks. The sedge-warbler in the reeds under the bridge is singing as if no rain had ever come to hush his tireless pipe. The boat, indeed, shows signs enough of what has been. The ancient mariner gets her ready, not with a baling-tin, but with a bucket.

However, all is dry and ship-shape at last, the lock is cleared, the sail is up, the wind is fair, the boat goes gaily down the stream. On all the gracious landscape there is no sign of the ill-weather, save perhaps an added touch of beauty. Even the draggled plumes of yesterday are fluttering in the sun, in what, to the gross eye of man, seems undiminished splendour. That tall young lady pulling stroke at least is none the worse for her drenching. Her time is as good, her feathering as clean as that of the stalwart oarsman in the bow. But doubtless it was yesterday's damp that has affected that bearded Hercules lolling in the stern of his boat, while two fair damsels at the sculls are dutifully rowing his lordship up the river.

The sun is warm on the long fringe of reeds. It brightens the rich spikes of loose-strife, the pale blue geraniums, the clouds of meadow-sweet. It shines on green blades of arrow-head, brown spears of bulrush. So glides the boat along with snowy sail, under wooded heights whose beeches wear already the first touch of the autumn; past the old mill whose blackened timbers are lighted with moss and many-coloured lichen; by noble manor house and peaceful farm; by rushing weir and reedy pool; now startling the brown water-rail from her noonday meditation, now taking unaware a little family of moorhens making their first essay with broad green oars.

Alas! it is all too fair a breeze. Mile after mile of the noble river glides all too rapidly away. All too soon the towers and chimneys come in sight that warn you that your cruise has reached its close. With many interchanges of regret your gear and you are put ashore. You wave a last salute as your comrades drift away under the bridge. They are gone.

You find when you reach the station that you are too soon for the express, and you lounge uncomfortably along the platform, eyed by every idler, and conscious that your costume is, after all, only fitted for the river. You wish that your flannels had at least escaped that touch of tar, and that the lock at Mapledurham had not left its mark upon your sleeve.

Then, as the swift train hurries you along, you look eagerly for brief glimpses of the river you have left. You catch sight of the long reach where, but an hour ago, you were drifting with the stream. You recognise the white houseboats, with their flags and flowers. The very skiffs, too, seem familiar. Yes, there is the very boat you saw this morning, with strength at the helm and beauty at the oar. The two girls are at it still; still the lord of creation is lolling idly in the stern.

IN AN APPLE COUNTRY

THOUGH September is apt to leave us in a stormy mood, it is a month full of gracious days, that to our impatient souls seem doubly welcome after the fickle temper of the summer; days of bright skies and balmy air; days whose quiet ending wraps the low hills in soft grey vapour, blending with a dreamy haze the border line of sea and sky. The trees seem still to wear the dress of summer; but when we look again there is a tinge of brown among the greenness. The scent of dying leaves is already in the air. The whole landscape seems to wait for that touch of magic that shall transmute to gold its fading green.

The flowers of the late summer linger still. The Canterbury bell still hangs its purple blossoms from the hedgerows, and the sweet breath of woodbine still scents the twilight air. Some flowers there are which belong only to this season. It is only at the approach of autumn that the low-lying meadows glow with purple crocus. It is only as the summer passes that there open on the hill-side the dark clusters of that small campanula that, as the legend tells, blooms only where the blood of Danes was spilt. We are on the threshold of the autumn, when the sweet lady's tresses lifts its pale spike of delicate green among the grass of upland pastures. And although upon the trees the touch of autumn is yet but faltering and uncertain, though flowers die slowly in the sharpening air, there is no lack of colour, at least along the hedge-row.

Perhaps there is nothing more characteristic of a Somersetshire village—unless it be the square grey tower of its ancient church—than its setting of green orchard-lands and the groups of apple-trees mingling with its white farms and homesteads. And now that harvesting is over, and the apple-crop is being gathered in, heaps of russet and red and gold are growing mellow in the warm October air. It is, often, but a scanty gathering. In many a west country orchard there is never more than a mere sprinkling of fruit,

> "Like the prophet's 'two or three berries
> In the top of the uppermost bough.'"

In the hands of the average farmer the apple yields but a precarious crop. Indeed, the promise of the autumn depends almost entirely on the temper of the spring. No blossom, not even of the peach or apricot, feels more keenly the least touch of frost; and the winds that in the spring-time shake so roughly the unsheltered branches are apt to be hardly less fatal to the grower's hopes.

The apple is with us an original inhabitant. The descendants of the crabtree that still lingers in the country hedgerow number now two thousand separate varieties. It was not, like the peach, the cherry, and the apricot, imported from the East. The fruit, indeed, is not a native of the East. Canon Tristram considers that the "apples" of the Song of Solomon were apricots; and although the fruit of the Forbidden Tree is often called an apple, it is not so named in the sacred narrative.

Even in Roman times apples were cultivated in Britain, and Somersetshire was evidently in King Arthur's days an apple country. The "orchard-lawns" that gave the name to "the island valley of Avilion" are not alluded to in the Survey; though the vineyards in *Terra Sce. Marie Glastingberiensis*, and in "other islands" near it are mentioned, clearly as a source of revenue.

Uncertain as must ever be the nature of the apple harvest, its chances are doubtless very much diminished by the manner in which too frequently the trees are treated. When the unpruned, neglected state of the trees in an ordinary West Country orchard is considered, the wonder is that there should be any yield at all.

Much of the Somersetshire apple crop is of value only to make cider; and the scent of the crushed apples and the rumble of the cider-mill are there as characteristic of the season of autumn as the thud of the flail upon the old barn floor or the yellow ricks in the well-ordered stackyard.

Cider apples are often remarkable for their beauty but it is a beauty that is only skin deep. Mingled with their vivid stains of crimson there is often a strange purplish bloom, a venomous look, that goes hand in hand with the flavour of ink or verdigris. But all is grist that comes to the cider-mill. It is no matter if the fruit be rotten; it is of little moment if the taste of the fresh apples should be rough and disagreeable. Good and bad are crushed together in the mill.

But with all this there is no denying that the juice fresh drawn, the sweet unfermented cider, is a pleasant beverage enough. It is in the after processes that cider making becomes a fine art. Extreme care is needed during fermentation; and so comparatively seldom is this care bestowed that the average rustic vintage is, when considered finished and matured, simply a detestable drink. The man who says he likes it is to be regarded with suspicion, and he who calls for another jug of it is a man who would drink anything.

The story of an apple orchard is full of life and colour. There are few country sights more full of beauty than the bloom which in the month of May gathers so thickly on the leafless branches, that gleam of snow-white blossom tinged with softest crimson, which is the crowning glory of a Somersetshire spring.

The best tended trees will give, no doubt, the finest show of flowers; but it is not among the precise and orderly lines of a well-kept orchard that the worshipper of nature loves to linger. His haunt is rather among the old weather-beaten trees on the warm slopes of some secluded valley in the hills; trees whose branches never felt the gardener's steel, and whose ancient trunks are grey with tufts of lichen. Here the brown squirrel frolics undisturbed, and even the shy jay finds here unbroken sanctuary.

The hedgerows, like the trees, are shaggy and unkempt; tangled wildernesses of sloe and bramble, of dogwood and hazel. The butterflies of autumn, Admiral and Painted Lady, sail from bush to bush, lightly touching, as they pass, the rich ripe blackberry clusters. Here, too, the Comma floats along on brown, velvety wings, or settling for a moment shows upon its dark underside the bold white "comma" that has given it its name.

We are perhaps accustomed to regard insects as especially the children of the summer, but there are many whose prime is at the summer's close. The cricket is pre-eminently a musician of the autumn; and there are some even of our most brilliant butterflies whose brief life begins only when summer days are nearly past. Round heavy-scented ivy flowers floats the royal Admiral, the soft light brightening further still the white and blue, the black and scarlet of his splendid wings. It was but yesterday that the perfect insect broke the brown husk of his chrysalis and spread his broadening beauty in the sunshine. A few weeks more, only, and he will creep away into some crevice in a tree or wall to sleep out the barren hours of winter, motionless and cold. In the spring-time he will waken with the rest for a few more weeks of sunshine, the showers of April and the smiles of May, though he is less often met with then, than other species which survive the winter.

Wasps are already beginning to grow drowsy, but for most of them it is the drowsiness forerunning death, not sleep. The frosty nights of October do us great service in destroying these troublesome insects, just as their colonies have reached their most flourishing condition.

The wasp, it may be observed is, if she is let alone, on the whole a well-behaved, as she is certainly always an industrious, member of society. She rarely stings unprovoked, being thus unlike the bee, who takes such marked and unaccountable dislikes to unoffending lingerers near the hive. Is it another indication of the high plane of civilisation reached by bees and wasps that the females only have weapons of defence? The unprotected males are entirely unarmed.

The population of a single wasps' nest may amount by the end of the season to as many as thirty thousand, without counting the grubs not then matured. But of all the thousands who during the summer have been born and bred within the bounds of the republic, not a handful will survive the winter. A few females will remain torpid in the nest, or hide in hollow trees or among heaps of stones, until warm days of spring revive them to start single-handed the founding of a new settlement.

As for the rest, the undeveloped grubs, for whom no food is ever stored, are at the approach of winter dragged from their cells and slaughtered; and the full-grown wasps, whose stings have saved the rising generation from the pangs of hunger, perish at the touch of frost.

The nest is a very triumph of engineering skill. A small hole in the ground leads along a gallery, sometimes dug by the little architects, sometimes the old working of a mouse or a mole, to a chamber often twelve to eighteen inches in diameter. This cavity is lined with layers of soft grey paper, made by the wasps out of wood-fibres which they have scraped with their strong jaws. In this space the combs, which have cells only on the lower side, are placed in horizontal layers. The cells, which are of wood like the lining on the walls, are used simply for the eggs and young, for the common wasp stores no honey. The combs are supported by diminutive pillars, of which there are sometimes fifty between the wider combs in the middle of the nest. The whole may in a large colony contain as many as 15,000 cells, and there are usually three broods in a season. Well is it indeed for us that winter comes to stop the increase of these swarms of brigands.

Of the unnumbered hosts of insects whose busy life, or beauty, whose inarticulate voices, or mere presence even, brightened the long hours of summer sunshine, myriads will perish at the approach of winter; not so much perhaps at the touch of frost, as having reached the fulness of their days. No less vast are the hosts that lie concealed as egg or grub or chrysalis till awakened by the coming of the spring.

Of insects that have reached the perfect state but few live through the winter. A few gnats remain, hiding in dark holes and corners, from which bright days will tempt them even at the season of Christmas. Many beetles, too, survive; some burrowing deep into the ground beyond the reach of frost, others sleeping in the mud at the bottom of ponds and ditches. The few species of butterflies that live into a second season, the wasps that survive the general destruction, the few moths and flies that stand the winter, hide in old trees, or roofs, or walls, or even in loose heaps of stone.

Insects which thus hibernate appear dead. Their animal functions are probably suspended. Their stiffened limbs display no sign of life. Some, again, seem entirely unaffected by the cold; and in the bitterest season will even frolic on the snow.

It is often said that a hard frost must do great service to the farmer by destroying grubs and hibernating insects; but it may be considered more than doubtful whether the frost does not tell rather the other way, and by hindering rooks and starlings from digging in the ground, prove to lower forms of life a defence instead of a destruction. For on insects, in any stage before the perfect form is reached, cold seems to have but slight effect. Some of those which pass the winter in the chrysalis condition do indeed defend themselves with thick wrappings of silk; but others are not so protected, and it has been shown that as a rule immature insects at least are unharmed by very low temperatures indeed. Eggs of the silkworm moth have survived a prolonged exposure to a cold of 38 deg. below zero Fahrenheit. "Caterpillars, so frozen that when dropped into a glass they chinked like stones, nevertheless revived." Chrysalids, converted by a cold of zero Fahrenheit into lumps of ice, have still produced butterflies. The larva of the crane fly—a most destructive pest, the grub of grubs—has been frozen hard without impairing its vitality. It has been observed, too, that after a winter of unusual severity, in which the temperature fell to zero, the insects that appeared in the following spring were as numerous as ever.

CORN IN EGYPT

Once more in the misty air of autumn the woods put on their royal splendours. The wind has scattered the bright colour of the chestnut; the rain has robbed the lime tree of its gilded leaves. The sullen foliage of the ash, that never gains from autumn skies an answering touch of fire, lies dark upon the woodland paths. But the green boughs of the oak are brightening with rich gleams of colour; branches of wild cherry seem wrapped in crimson flame; noble elm trees wear undimmed their crowns of gold. Sheets of bracken, brown with sun and rain, tinge with the hue of heather all the barren hills. Along the hedgerows, and in green lane and coppice, the maples ripen to their prime. Some are lightly touched with colour here and there; one is kindling in a ruddy glow; here among the wrinkled branches, as by the wand of a magician, every leaf is turned to gold. Bright, too, is the tattered foliage of the bramble, clouded with soft shades of brown and crimson, veined with tender green and reddened at the tips like points of flame. And all along the bank, through the sad colour of the drooping grasses, shine the hart's-tongue leaves, hiding with broad green fronds the vivid berries of the arum. There is scanty gleaning left of the rich harvest of the hedgerow. The hips hang still on swaying sprays of briar, and the dark red of abundant haws tinges the sombre leafage of the thorn. But no black and crimson berries shine among dark leaves of cornel. Long since plundered are wayfaring tree and rowan. But on the green stems of the spindle the fiery seeds are shining through their crimson shells. Among tangled sprays of bitter-sweet droop still the ruby clusters. On long festoons of bryony, stripped of their dark purple leaves, shine like fire the chains of brilliant berries.

Among the rain of leaves that patters day and night upon the shivering branches none are brighter than the red spoils of the beech. Its scattered foliage lights the forest slope, and as with the light of sunset the tall trees tinge the very air. As the brown squirrel leaps from tree to tree across the wood a floating track of colour marks his way. Hardly seen at first as he rested on a bough, he watched with fearless mien your coming. He has not stirred at the rustle of your footsteps on the leaves. He is hardly a dozen feet away. His bright eyes show no sign of fear; his bushy tail droops idly from the bough. Calmly he watches the invasion of his realm. Now a sudden impulse seizes him, and he runs a little way along the swaying branch. But he has no thought of flight, for with a quick dexterous leap he faces about and scampers back. And now this way and now that, as if carried away by the gladness of his simple soul, he runs along the bough. Then with a quick change he scrambles up the tree, his sharp claws rattling on the polished bark. Again he leaps lightly down, catching in his fall a slender arm that swings him back to his first starting point. Then up and up he goes till he gains the far summit; then along his airy highway he springs from tree to tree, and is lost in the green tangle overhead.

A mournful stillness there is among the brightness of autumn trees. Silence reigns in all the woodland, save for the song of the untiring robin, the chatter of a passing troop of tits, or the larum of a restless wren. Not even a belated chiffchaff lifts his cheery voice in a warm corner of the wood. Stray swallow or martin, on the wing for the far south, may still visit us in passing, but all the birds of spring-time have gone with the summer to lands beyond the Line.

Silently the northern rovers fall into the vacant places. The woodcock—whose voice is never heard save for a brief space in spring—finds his way back to the familiar cover. Huge flights of scaup and widgeon descend upon the waters of the bay. Unnumbered hosts of dunlins are gathering on the shore. In well-known haunts in field and upland the fieldfare finds refuge from the terrors of the winter. The fisherman afloat upon the wild North Sea hears in the dark above him the cries of passing birds; pauses from his toil to listen to phantom voices overhead—clang of goose and plaint of redwing, and all

> "The sounds sent down at night
> By birds of passage in their flight."

A few of the birds that visit us in winter are well known, at least by name; but perhaps the larger number are familiar only to the naturalist and the sportsman. There are about 450 birds which inhabit these islands, and of which specimens have been at various times reported. Of these, however, there are some seventy which are regarded with doubt; and, although doctors disagree as to whether every bird whose appearance has been once recorded should be reckoned on our list or not, there are many naturalists who would still further reduce the total by discarding the stray fugitives—from the very ends of the earth some of them, whose accidental visits have generally been considered sufficient to give them claim to citizenship.

About fifty birds regularly come to us in spring to spend the summer here, building their nests in English woodlands and green lanes; and then, when leaves are falling, they turn south again to pass the winter under an African sun.

Thirty more, chiefly water-loving birds, ducks, and geese, plovers and sandpipers, come southward at the approach of winter from their haunts on northern islands, or from Siberian marshes by the Polar Sea.

One hundred and sixty-five are "occasional visitors." Some of these have been seen but once. Others, like the wild swan and the crane, were in old times native here; but by degrees, as their haunts were broken up and their sanctuaries invaded, they left us for some more secluded region.

There remain, then, only 128 which we may regard as permanent residents—birds which stay in England all the year, and which, in their haunts, may be found at any season. Some of them, larks and starlings, buntings and finches, collect in flocks in winter, and wander in search of food. And there are, after all, comparatively few birds whose numbers are not augmented in the autumn by arrivals from abroad, or who in times of scarcity do not pass beyond the sea.

The birds of the air are beset by many dangers. The story of their little lives is darkened by ills that wait for them in many forms. The jay plunders their unguarded eggs; the crow makes havoc of their callow young, while they by men and beast are slain on every hand. But never tooth or talon, no treacherous snare, or even murderous gun, is half so fatal to the race as is the grip of a "real old-fashioned winter." Frost to them is famine. The teal and mallard turn from rivers cased in ice to forage on the wintry sea. On cold nights of winter, the dunlins by the falling tide can gather still some jetsam ere the white surf hardens on the sand. But for the general throng, when their feet are powerless on the frozen land, or when snow lies deep over their hunting grounds, there is no choice but exile or starvation. Thus, at the setting in of winter, myriads of wild fowl journey south to seek more hospitable quarters. Thus the fieldfare and the redwing, the woodcock and a score of others leave a land of frost and famine to spend the season under milder skies.

With much of this kind of movement, this exodus in search of food, we are abundantly familiar, as, for instance, the flocks of larks that in winter gather on the Sussex downs or among the fields of Bedfordshire. In such vast hosts do they assemble that as many as fifteen thousand have been netted in a single night round the lighthouse tower and in the fields of Heligoland. It is said that half a million are sold each year in the London markets. No fewer than five millions have been brought into Leipsic in the course of twelve months; while a single month's supply for that city has been known to equal the entire yearly sale in London.

Many protests have been raised against this unholy slaughter, but from the farmer's point of view it is some set off, at least, against the damage done by flocks of skylarks to the springing corn. Some, on the other hand, would plead that by his service of sweet song the skylark's wage is fairly earned. Others again, and it is not impossible that there may even be naturalists among them, regard as no mean addition to the table those "little larks in paper baskets" that made the schoolmaster of Canaan City "feel a Lord all over."

But there are other birds who, unprompted by experience or the traditions of their clan, know nothing of any land of promise in the south, and who are thrown at once upon the parish. Regarded merely as an investment, looked at solely as a matter of business and of common prudence, we shall do well to stretch out helping hands, to keep alive our bold retainers through the days of famine. Now, in the time of their extremity, let us remember their good deeds. It is no mere question of sentiment.

"They are the wingèd wardens of your farms
Who from the cornfields drive the insidious foe,
And from your harvests keep a hundred harms."

If the sparrow does wantonly—at least, so far as we can see—cut down a few crocuses in the spring-time; if he does in summer string a few currants from your favourite bushes, consider how well, how long, how untiringly he guarded them from grub and wireworm. Did not the starlings keep watch and ward over the land, it would be overrun with very plagues of Egypt. Were it not for the industrious tits that forage among your fruit trees, the grubs would certainly have all the best of the harvesting. All the year they have done us yeoman's service. What if they have at times taken toll of seed or fruit? Let us not grudge such retainers

"——a scant handful more or less of wheat,
Or rye, or barley, or some other grain,
Scratched up at random by industrious feet,
Searching for worm or weevil after rain."

But looking at the question in quite another way—no one who has not tried it can realise how much pleasure is to be derived from watching the birds that flock to the scattered bounty. Laying aside for the time being much of that shyness which we are apt to call natural, but which is most surely born of long contact with cruelty and ways of darkness, they soon learn the place and hour of almsgiving; and in hard weather will collect in still increasing crowds that with their varied beauty and the endless charm of their graceful movements will repay a hundredfold the kindness of their almoner.

Of course, there is none of all the crowd who is quite so charming as the robin. His confident air, his bright red breast, the twinkle of his bold black eye, his smart bearing, and his courtly bow rank him easily the first favourite. When food is set out upon a board placed close to the window, the robin is the first to find it out, the first to venture near; and then, watching all the while the watchers in the room, he takes his meal with a grace no other guest can rival for a moment. But the robin needs no introduction, requires no plea on his behalf. There are many almoners for him. His mere presence is a charm. His clear, cool singing, very sunshine of dark winter days, is full return for every favour.

But if his ways especially endear him to the fancy, the little family of tits, when once they have become familiar, will run him very close in the popular regard. If you will hang up a bone or a piece of fat near the window, the tits will soon discover it, and when they are satisfied that all is safe, they will come to it from morning to night. There are three who are pretty sure to become regular visitors, and perhaps a rarer fourth may sometimes show himself. First comes the blue tit

—the tomtit of immemorial usage, a picture in himself, not only for his bright blue cap and yellow breast, his white cheeks and the neat black line about his neck, but by reason of the marvellous grace and endless variety of his attitudes. It is generally some time before a new comer feels properly at home. He may settle near the bone or even on it, but waits and watches, and looks this way and that, up, down, round on all sides—the very picture of indecision, and perhaps flies off a dozen times before he musters courage to settle to his dinner. But when his fit of shyness is over, and when he has made up his mind that there is no danger to be apprehended, there is a charm in his way of going to work that must be seen to be appreciated. Now standing upright on the bone, now—and this seems to be his favourite attitude—hanging head downwards under it, now with one tiny claw upon the cord and the other on his dinner, he is never for a moment still. Now stopping short, with his comical little head on one side, he regards you with a half doubtful, half patronising, wholly impertinent air, and then sets to again, tearing away the tiniest morsels with his tiny beak.

The great tit or ox-eye is dressed in bolder tints. His slightly larger size, his black head, his white cheeks (much whiter than those of his smaller kinsman), and his handsome black-cravat, distinguish him easily from the others. There is a soberer tone about the coal-tit, whose dull grey breast cannot match the yellow of his smart relations. But the glossy black upon his head, with a touch of white behind it, makes him a smart little fellow enough. Not greatly different is the less common marsh-tit; but he lacks the white behind the head.

But of all that gather into flocks in winter no birds are better known or are seen in vaster flights than starlings. And while other wandering bands are shy and keep aloof, the rigour of the season brings the starling nearer to man's dwelling, and when times are hard he will not hesitate to throw himself on the hospitality of his suzerain.

When the ground is hard as iron and the rime is on the grass no bird accepts more readily the dole of food that kind hands scatter on the lawn. No sooner has the news gone out along the housetops that there is corn in Egypt than the flying forms of hurrying starlings are seen on every side. Bearing up in their swift course they hover a moment in the air, and swoop at once upon the feast. Other birds may make a feint of settling down, stealing in and out among the laurels, hanging round the spot like a lugger standing off and on upon a coast well guarded by preventive men.

A troop of sparrows collected in a neighbouring thorn eye doubtfully the proffered food, discussing in loud tones the chance of snares concealed among the crumbs, or of cats in ambush in the bushes. Perhaps, too, even their tough consciences are uneasy at the thought of all that mischief in the crocus bed, knowing that it is their wanton bills that have strewn the golden petals in ruin on the ground.

But the bold starling, feeling no weight of guilt upon his soul, settles to his work as if he meant it and had no mind to waste his opportunities.

A restless crew it is that gathers on the grass, never for an instant still, all their energies intent upon the business of the moment. They are mostly silent, save perhaps for a faint chatter as they settle down, or short alarm note when the troop is scattered by a passing step. The harmony is only broken when some old campaigner is seen to hurry off with a rather larger crumb than usual. There is food enough for all; but on the instant he is chased by communistic comrades, who, talking all at once, seek volubly to prove their rights, and if it is not too late enforce their arguments by a high-handed redistribution which shall bring the guilty plunderer down to the level of his brothers.

The starlings are rather a quarrelsome set. Indeed, with all the birds that come it is a case of "Each man for himself; and no man for his neighbour." It is quite a common thing for one starling to lay claim to two bones, lying some little way apart, and to keep off any starving comrade that may dare to venture near. Sometimes two rival claimants, after doing battle on the ground with beak and claw, will rise into the air screaming, fluttering, and fighting, until the weaker bird gives in. The robin, too, is apt to regard the window sill and all upon it as his own exclusive property, as many a bold tit and easy-going greenfinch has discovered to his cost. Larger birds will seldom venture near. A passing magpie may perhaps turn back and circle over, as if half inclined to join the company; but they are too near the house for a bird with such a character as his. He sheers off again and makes for the safer cover of the woods. A little troop of jackdaws will alight upon the grass, their grey heads giving them a grave and reverend air altogether foreign to their real temper. There is, in truth, but little gravity about them. They are a jovial crew, whose voices have a sort of reckless, dare-devil sound, as if conscious of a reputation much blown upon, and of unpleasant stories about a cardinal's ring. They are fine fellows, but their genius for plunder shows itself directly. Making a hasty scramble for the most attractive pieces, they carry them off to neighbouring housetops to devour their loot at leisure.

The rook is not so easily induced to take a hand. Mistrustful of man and all his works, he flies past again and again, fluttering in the air, his legs hanging down as if he had made up his mind to take the plunge at last. Time after time he gives it up and settles in a tree hard by, whose branches bend under his clumsy figure. When at length he does alight, it is but for a moment. He stalks solemnly up and down, then seizing in his beak the largest piece of all, hops forward a little, spreads his great wings, and is gone.

Among the birds that visit us in winter, few perhaps are more familiar, at least by name, than the woodcock. It was formerly considered to be almost exclusively a winter visitor, going northward again in the spring. "It cannot indeed be denied," wrote Gilbert White in 1770, "but that now and then we hear of a woodcock's nest, or young bird, discovered in some part or other of these islands; but then they are always mentioned as rarities and somewhat out of the common course of things."

Of late years, however, owing largely perhaps to the growing interest in natural history, and partly no doubt to a real increase in the number of stay-at-home birds, woodcocks' eggs have been reported from nearly every county in England. In one part of Sussex alone an average of 150 to 200 nests a year has been recorded.

One of the most remarkable points in connection with this bird is the manner in which, when disturbed, it has been known to carry its young to a place of safety. It was even stated by Scopoli, 120 years ago, that it held them in its beak. Gilbert White, after speaking of "Scopoli's new work (which I have just procured)," says: "He also advances some (I was going to say) improbable facts; as when he says of the woodcock '*pullos rostro portat fugiens ab hoste*.' But," he continues, with a modesty perhaps not always quite sufficiently remembered by writers on natural history, "candour forbids me to say absolutely that any fact is false because I have never been witness to such a fact. I have only to remark that the long unwieldy bill of the woodcock is perhaps the worst adapted of any among the winged creation for such a feat of natural affection."

That the bird does carry its young has been proved by the observations of many writers, though certainly not in its bill, and probably not in its claws. It appears to grasp them between its thighs, perhaps even holding them closer by pressing them against its body with its beak.

The goldcrest, is known to the North Sea fishermen as the "woodcock-pilot;" for they say that when the goldcrest comes the woodcock is not far behind it. Not only is the goldcrest the least of English birds, but there are many humming-birds which reach a larger size. It takes just half-a-dozen full-grown goldcrests to weigh an ounce. It is indeed marvellous that so frail a creature should ever pass in safety the eight hundred miles of sea that part us from the Norway coast.

In spite of the fact that enormous multitudes of this "Tot-o'er-seas," as it is called on the Northumbrian coast, visit us in the winter, it is here a permanent resident. There are many parts of the country where, in almost any clump of firs or larches, it may be found throughout the year. But its diminutive size, its low sweet song, its feeble call notes, are all somewhat insignificant, and its tiny figure might easily be overlooked. It is even no uncommon visitor to the garden, not only in the open country, but on the skirts at least of the town; and if quietly approached will swing at its ease within a yard or so of the observer, displaying every now and then that splendid streak of yellow on its crown, reddening into rich orange down the centre, which has earned it so appropriate a name. A dainty bird; and its nest—a cradle of green moss, dotted over with grey points of lichen, slung like a hammock underneath some drooping bough—is a work of art hardly less beautiful than the masterpiece even of the humming-bird itself.

The woodcock is a shy, night-feeding bird, that in the daytime seldom stirs beyond the limits of the covert. The presence of the goldcrest lends but little to the landscape. But among these wandering strangers there are some which are very marked features in the winter scenery. Such are the two migratory thrushes, the redwing and the fieldfare, whose names, in spite of considerable difference in their dress and habits, we so often link together. The dull December shore would be desolate indeed without its smart oyster-catchers, its musical, quiet-tinted plovers, its clouds of sandpipers, now flying fast along the sea, now wheeling with the silver gleam of a myriad upturned wings, and now with plaintive cries scattering on the yellow sand. Welcome even are the fleets of ducks that ride in thousands on the long grey waves, the bold clear colouring of their handsome plumage rising and falling on the heaving sea.

A HERONRY IN THE HOME COUNTIES

DEEP over the dreary landscape grows the silence of December days. A wintry wind is stirring in the lanes, and in the brief hours of daylight voiceless birds wander disconsolate over whitened fields. Even when the sun is sinking low, and far hills darken on the fiery sky; when the brown flood of the great river changes in the charm of sunset to soft tones of green and crimson, there is still no answer from the tenants of the coppice. No longer sounds the blackbird's vesper hymn. By his clamorous call-notes he is heard alone ere he settles to his rest among the ivy The thrushes too are silent, save a bold-hearted minstrel here and there, who, undaunted by the cold, is singing still.

And when the colour has faded from the west, when the moon is bright along a silver sea, and the dark sky trembles with the glitter of the stars, hardly less striking is the silence of the night. There is no sound but of the night wind as it stirs the withered reeds, the shiver of dead leaves among dismantled boughs, or the ring of footsteps on the frozen road. Hushed are the noises of the summer night, unheard its ceaseless sounds of stirring life.

For nightfall then, though ever closing tired eyes in sleep, still roused slaves of Nature from their rest, and in the hours of darkness there was stillness but not silence. Then even before the sun was down were heard shrill voices, faint but still audible, of bats that fluttered out upon their noiseless wings. Then in the dusk the beetle droned along the highway. On the edge of every coppice rang loud the chirp of crickets. Along the bank of the river rose the hum of innumerable gnats. Now, in the dark of cave and tower and tree, the bats hang motionless. The wings of the beetle are folded in his winter sleep; long since silent is the chorus of the crickets. Vanished is the vast array of gnats whose unseen armies raised over the woods that mighty hum that filled the summer air.

Nor are bats and insects the only figures that have vanished from the shadowy scene. No more at nightfall does the hedgehog stir abroad, emerging from his snug retreat to forage in the farmyard or the cover. Now, rolled in a very ball of prickles, he lies asleep in his cosy nest among the roots of some old tree. The hedgehog, though he does good service in destroying snails and beetles, has a reputation not wholly free from stain, and his weakness for misappropriating eggs and chickens has frequently got him into difficulties in unsuspected rat-traps. Though not recognised as a popular article of diet, the hedgehog is on the gipsy's game list, and in country lanes his prickly skin is a sight almost as familiar as the ashes of the camp fire. Having been dug out and killed he is enveloped without further ceremony in a ball of well-kneaded clay, which is placed in the red-hot embers. The cracking of the clay marks the end of the operation. The skin comes off with its earthen shell, disclosing a dainty morsel of white meat within.

The bark of the fox is not a very familiar sound, but he is as wide awake as ever these cold nights, and levies his blackmail still, often slaughtering in his reckless way far more than he can carry off.

The badger is of a more indolent turn, and when the weather is severe is content to lie quiet among the warm bedding of his holt; and when once the snow lies deep about his threshold, it is seldom sullied by his shambling feet.

For the owl as for the fox, there is no respite, however chill the night, and as he sails from tree to tree he hoots in plaintive tone, as if lamenting the hard fate that drove him forth in such uncomfortable weather. However, he is particularly well protected by his feathered coat, and probably he feels the cold but little. A terrible foe to the tiny fur-clad dwellers in the field is the bold brown owl. No sound betrays his movements. Silent and unseen, his great wings sweep along. No note of warning reaches the unconscious ears of mouse or vole before the cruel talons sink into its tender sides.

One would think there was little sport for him these hard nights. But in the warm shelter of the woodland there is movement still. And when among the boughs the shadows deepen, and grey mists gather on the wooded slope; when there sounds no more the twitter of the robins, and restless blackbirds are quieted at last, still on the dead leaves patter everywhere the light feet of mice and shrews.

Most woodland birds retire at nightfall to the covert of the ivy, to holes in walls and trees, or to boughs of sheltering fir. Others, content with the open hedgerow, rely on their own coats to keep them warm. Some huddle together for the sake of warmth, and at such times it has been observed that there is keen competition for an inside place, and that when a row of tits, for instance, has settled down to sleep upon a branch, the anxiety to avoid an end seat in the line keeps the whole company in continual movement.

Many birds again that seldom or never perch on trees spend the night upon the ground—the skylark and his clan, the partridge, and many of the waders. Rooks, too, have been seen apparently collected for the night among the furrows of an open field. The pheasant roosts in winter in a tree, and thus on moonlight nights he falls an easy prey to the black art of the poacher. Some of the wading birds—the dunlins and the plovers, whose plaintive notes are heard all night along the shore—probably sleep during part of the day upon the water. Gannets have been found at night thus rocked to sleep upon the sea, overtaken perhaps by the darkness while far from their island haunts.

But, over the low lands by the river, birds keep vigil all the night. The ditches are not wholly cased in ice, nor is the moorland yet so hard as to drive them to the sea. Wild duck settle down in the darkness in the reeds along the river. From the sky above sounds now and then the muttered croak of a heron flying leisurely down from his home among the hills.

A dreary watch is his, as he waits all night among the sedge that lines the stream. Round his broad feet planted on the sand the icy waves are flowing. Silent he stands, and motionless, watching in the moonlight for faintest stir of eel or minnow. The frogs to whom his sport is death are lying all unconscious of the nearness of their foe, in the mud at the bottom of the river. The heron's dress seems at first sight ill adapted to withstand the bitter weather; but his wings are thick and strong and the flowing plumes upon his breast no doubt defend him well.

A shy and solitary bird is the grey-coated fisher, a lover of wild haunts remote from man, a lingerer by lonely mere and solitary stream. Have immemorial years of training—the stillness and the silence of long vigil on calm moonlit nights—given him his air of gravity and gloom, or do traditions of his race recall old memories of vanished greatness?

Once he was a bird of mark, honoured by the chase of kings. Stern penalties protected his sequestered haunts; fines and imprisonment defended him from harm. Under the Plantagenets he was the prince of wild fowl. In Tudor times it was still criminal to compass his destruction save by the falcon or the longbow. The fowler of our time lets him pass unheeded; his grey coat no longer is a mark for bolt or bird.

In the heron's days of fame the tall crane was perhaps as plentiful as he. Now, while the one is scattered still through every corner of the kingdom, the other is but a straggler from foreign shores, a casual caller who visits us, in passing merely, on the wing for distant lands. But the crane built his house, so to speak, upon the sand. His nest was on the ground, among the reed-beds of the fens. Centuries have passed since spade and plough broke up his haunts among the marshes. The heron, on the other hand, builds among the boughs of trees, in the shelter of guarded game-covers, or in solitary spots seldom harried by the spoiler, and thus, within English bounds alone, more than a hundred heronries remain.

Seen far off at his solitary watch by the river, or on wide levels of the marshland, the heron is not an unfamiliar figure; well we know his stately flight when, drifting to his home among the hills, his wings are dark upon the sunset sky.

But on the margin of the forest, where a belt of woodland screens a sheet of quiet water, lies a little islet, overgrown with oaks and birches, safe sanctuary for teal and wild duck, the very "haunt of coot and hern." The wintry sunshine brightens the long strip of green that lines the shore, lingers on the red bark of graceful fir-trees, lifting slender shafts above the underwood, and lies in lines of silver on the quiet pool. Softly, with silent oars, we glide along the creek. in whose still depths are mirrored stalwart oak and silvery birch tree. A belt of sedge stirs slightly as we pass, its brown leaves sounding still—

> "—— a low lament
> Of unrest and discontent,
> As the story is retold
> Of the nymph, so coy and cold,
> Who, with frightened feet, outran
> The pursuing steps of Pan."

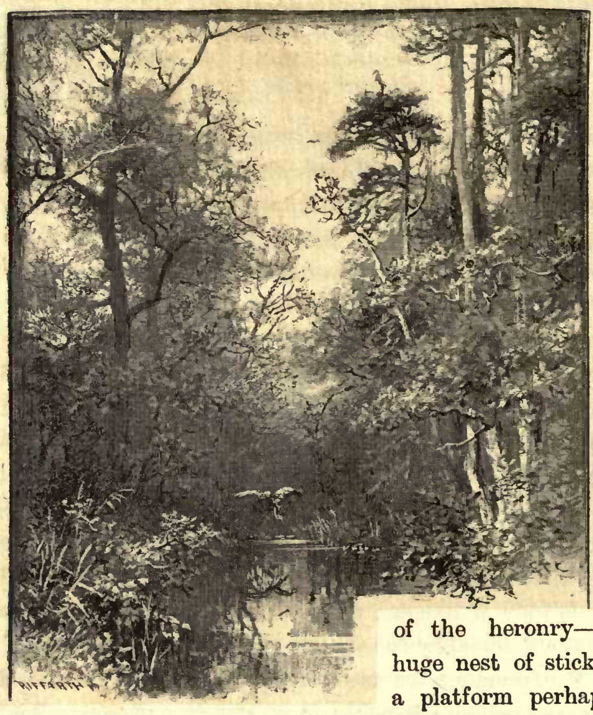
Over it lean down the alder boughs, tasselled thick with young brown cones. There is silence everywhere, save for the sighing of the sedge, the rush of the Roding under its pollard willows hurrying past, and at times the sonorous call of some heron unseen among the shadows of the island. The rooks, whose still vacant dwellings crowd the grey arms of yonder ash-tree, hold their own on the very threshold of their powerful neighbours, and in the fatal conflicts between black and grey, renewed each season on the island, the vantage is by no means always with the tenants of the heronry.

Now on a creek that runs in among the bushes, a wild-duck floats lazily along, a gleam of sunshine lighting up the velvet of his glossy head. Another moment, and he is ware of danger; he quickens his pace, he vanishes in the shadows by the shore.

Far in among the trees, where the water is darkened by grey willows hanging over, stands a heron—silent and motionless. Beyond him is another, and far on another still. Next moment they are lost again, as we pass their narrow entrance.

Suddenly, from the shelter of the sedge, starts out a kingfisher, that like a gleam of light sails down the winding shore.

Now, at length, right before us, in a great chestnut that towers above the lesser crowd of trees, is an outpost of the heronry—a huge nest of sticks, a platform perhaps six feet across, and on it stands erect a great bird whose long legs seem out of keeping altogether with the branches of a tree.



Now more nests, four and five together in a single tree, broad and massive structures some of them, the accumulated piles of generations. We are very near them now, and on one is a tall sentry very plain to see as he stands dreaming on his nest. An old heron in his nuptial plumage is a gallant bird. But there is barely time to mark the exquisite tone of grey in his great wings, the waving feathers on his breast, and the long plume floating from his head. For now there passes near a fleet of wild ducks paddling fast along. The old mallard in front catches sight of the boat; with loud note of warning he rises on the wing, followed fast by all his train.

The drowsy heron high up among the branches lifts his plumed head with a start, looks round a moment, then with muttered croak stretches his long snake-like neck, flaps hastily his mighty wings, dangles his long legs awkwardly below. But as he gets under way, the neck is drawn in, the legs trail easily astern, the broad wings settle down to a slow and steady flight—a very triumph of the wing.

A slender burden is it after all that those great wings bear along. Though standing three feet high, and with wings five feet in span, the whole bird weighs but three pounds and a half. An old Scotch legend makes him vary in condition with the phases of the moon, and no doubt he does fare better on moonlit nights than when the darkness shelters from his deadly spear the hapless trout.

But now the whole place is in a tumult. At the first sound of wings a wild duck rose among the reeds near by, then another, and another; then all the sedge along the shore that but now seemed empty, voiceless, is astir with splashing and the sounds of flight. More ducks get up on every hand and join the startled troop, whose wings are whistling overhead. Herons, before unseen, rise slowly from their nests and soar with stately flight far up above our heads. Round and round over the trees drifts the long wedge of wild duck, the dark heads of the drakes clear cut against the pale blue sky. Then as we row slowly back and gain once more the open water, as the brushwood hides from sight the flash of oars, the birds wheel down again upon their sheltered pool.

AN OLD RIVER PORT

The rough weather of autumn gives the high October tides an added strength and fury. On a bold and rock-bound coast, where their rage can bring no terror to the land, the waves are welcome for their stormy grandeur. But when wind and tide are high together their coming is viewed with less indifference by the natives of low-lying shores. To them the "spring"-tide that comes in before a gale may mean mischief; may leave behind it flooded lands, drowned sheep, and floating hayricks.

On the south shore of the Bristol Channel, in the marshes that stretch from Clevedon to the Quantocks, the autumn tides are well remembered for the havoc they have wrought. Not once nor twice have the rugged hills of sand that have drifted high along the old sea-wall given way before "the flood tide of St. Matthew," leaving miles of moorland to be covered by the waves. Well is it for the hamlets that are scattered on these wide alluvial plains that tides are seldom at their highest

> "When descends on the Atlantic
> The gigantic
> Storm-wind of the equinox."

But there could be no better time than such a coincidence of wind and wave for watching on some slow-moving river that strange incoming of the tide that is known as The Bore. Buckland has described how, on the Severn, the first wave of the rising tide comes in with a rush that, when the stream is at its lowest ebb, broadens the great river from a narrow span of fifty yards to a breadth of nearly a mile in a few minutes.

Such a wave as this fore-ran that fatal flood upon the coast of Lincolnshire when

> "So farre, so fast the eygre drave,
> The heart had hardly time to beat,
> Before a shallow, seething wave
> Sobbed in the grasses at oure feet:
> The feet had hardly time to flee
> Before it brake against the knee
> And all the world was in the sea."

Such waves come up the Mersey and the Humber; and no doubt Scott describes what he had often seen when he makes Lochinvar say, "Love swells like the Solway, but ebbs like its tide." On the Seine and the Rhone there are tidal waves which fill those rivers in just this sudden way.

But it is on the Amazon that the phenomenon attains its greatest magnitude. Indeed, the very name of the river is derived from an Indian word meaning *boat destroyer*, in allusion to the fury of its sudden tides. During a few days in every month the sea, "instead of taking its usual time to come up the river, swells to its full height in less than a couple of minutes," with a roar that may be heard at a distance of five miles. The tidal wave that enters the wide estuary of the Amazon, becoming cramped for room as it advances by the narrowing channel of the stream, is piled into a wall of water twelve or fifteen feet high, that rushing with tremendous swiftness up the river sometimes tears huge trees from the banks and even sweeps away whole tracts of land.

The Bore that floods the channel of the Parret has little of the grandeur of a wave like this. But with the narrow, dingy river that makes its slow way seaward among the mud flats of the channel are linked interests unknown to many a mightier stream.

Long after the Saxon conquest the Parret formed the boundary between the Kelts and the invaders. It was by the Parret that Alfred found shelter in the Isle of Athelney—island indeed no longer. From the quays of its little port generations of sea rovers have watched the rush of the tide into the narrow river. The soft northern speech of the fair-haired Vikings who warp their craft into the docks recalls the days when the war-galleys of their fathers came to anchor off the town. When Cabot set sail from Bristol on his great voyage to the westward, half his crew were men of Bridgwater—famous even then for its sons of enterprise and daring.

They are but clumsy craft, for the most part, that are moored along the grimy quays. The scar on the battered bulwarks of the *Happy go Lucky* does, indeed, seem in harmony with her name. But the *Adventure* and the *Active* are a pair of heavy, sullen-looking coasters, whose souls were never raised above the wish to carry coals. But in the Armada days, when, in the summer midnight, the beacons flared along the hills,

> "And as the stirring signal flew,
> To north, to south, the muster grew
> Round many a Mendip farm,"

on board the *William*—no better craft perhaps than these—did forty bold companions put out to fight the fleet of Spain.

Even in Norman days Bridgwater was a place of mark. The Domesday record places it in the domains of Walter de Douai. "Walscinus," says the old survey, "holds Brugie,"—perhaps "the bridge," for in later documents the name appears as Bridge Walter, to distinguish it no doubt from another passage higher up the stream—Borough Bridge, near Athelney. It was there, among the very earthworks that King Alfred raised, that Goring had an outpost before the siege of Bridgwater.

That siege was perhaps the most prominent scene in the last great struggle in the West, and the fall of the town in the summer of 1645 was but one of many disasters that, in that fatal year, befell the Royal arms. The year after its surrender, the old fortress that for four centuries had stood on the brink of the river was dismantled by an order of Parliament, and in our time no trace of it remains but the massive masonry of the water-gate, faint outlines of portions of the moat, and some subterranean chambers by the river.

The town was roughly handled in that siege, and suffered dire extremities at the hands of friend and foe. In the register in the church of St. Mary are memorials of some of the garrison who were buried under fire. The records are but brief. It is now *miles bombarda occisus*—a soldier killed by a musket-ball; and now again we gather that *duo milites incogniti nominis*—two soldiers of unknown name—were laid together in a common grave. But a far heavier penalty was exacted from Bridgwater forty years later for the sympathy and service it had rendered to the cause of Monmouth.

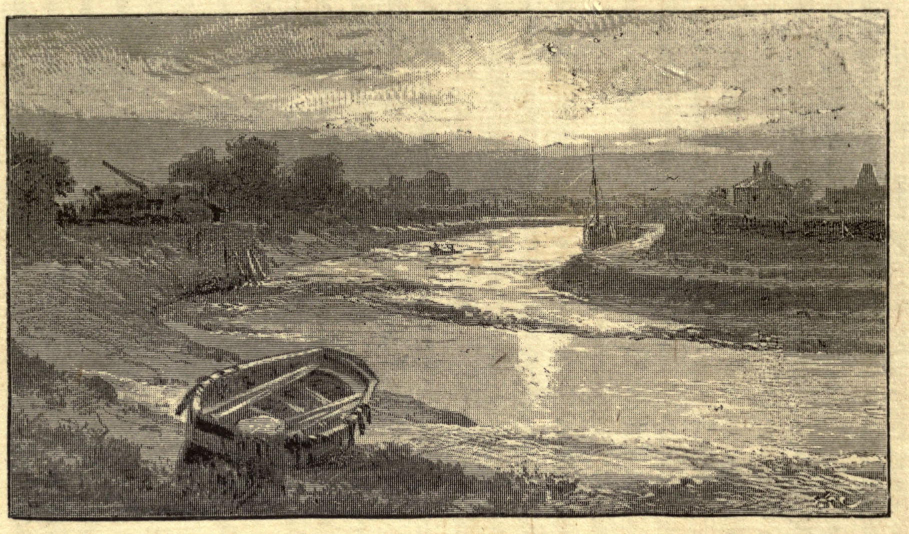
The old market cross, where the Duke was hailed as King amid the acclamations of the populace, has been gone nearly a century; but the church tower from which, on the eve of Sedgemoor, he looked across the moorland to the tents of Feversham, still keeps watch over the town.

Inside the building there hangs over the altar a singularly striking picture, a "Descent from the Cross," whose noble treatment and soft and beautiful colouring prove it to be the work of no mean hand, though the name of the master is unknown. There is a tradition that this painting was part of the plunder taken from a Spanish privateer, and that it was presented to the Corporation of Bridgwater early in last century. So great a favourite was it of Sir Joshua Reynolds that it is said that he was in the habit of visiting the town on his journeys to and from Plymouth, and of spending hours in the church in contemplation of the picture.

The path on the bank of the river, passing the old house where Blake was born, and which is still much as he last saw it in the heyday of his great renown, crosses the main street of the little port, leads past the now unseen watergate of the castle, along the narrow coal-blackened quays, past the smoking brick-kilns to the fields beyond the town. If the fame of this quiet little port is not widely known beyond the limits of the island, its work is familiar probably to half the civilised world.

Bath bricks, first invented by a Mr. Bath, of Bridgwater, are still made from the mud of the Parret, and are at least the most noted produce of the town. The retiring tide deposits a stratum of mud, which, if undisturbed, reaches in the course of a year a thickness of as much as twelve feet. This is dug from the banks at intervals of three months, made into bricks, and baked in the furnaces whose great red cones are so conspicuous along the shore. There is only quite a limited distance above and below the town, where the salt and fresh water mingling in certain proportions leave a deposit of just the right consistency for making bricks.

An hour before high water the slow moving river seems to loiter in its flow, as if pausing undecided in its course. The floating rubbish is now swept slowly down, and now as slowly drifted back by a sudden flaw of wind. They have seen the Bore a hundred times, but groups



THE BORE ON THE PARRET.

of sailors, with bronzed, sea-beaten faces, are lounging on the bank, waiting for the first rush of the tide.

Along the low horizon, a pale saffron line is broadening to the dawn. The mist of an autumn morning hangs heavily on far-off trees, whence the dark figures of rooks begin to scatter over the meadows.

All at once there is heard, through the still morning air, a long, low roar. Far down the stream a cry is raised, taken up by the idlers on the bank and echoed by brickyard men who have stopped their work to watch the Bore—"Here she comes."

Round the far bend appears a line of white, drawing rapidly nearer. Right across the river runs the wave—a roaring wall of water, four feet high, breaking on the unruffled surface of the motionless stream. It rushes high along the bank on either hand, rocking the tall ships like toys, and on and on among the shipping moored along the quays. A pilot boat coming up on the swift current is whirled along like a bit of flotsam, though steadied deftly with well-handled sculls.

In such a rush, Cromwell and Fairfax, reconnoitring the defences of the castle from a boat on the river, were taken unawares and their craft was within an ace of being overset.

In a quarter of an hour the water has risen eight feet; and still it streams on, bringing up long trails of seaweed from the shore, tufts of sedge torn off from distant banks, corks from some fisher's net, pieces even of bamboo, that on far-reaching currents have been drifted half-way round the world.

AN OLD HILL FORTRESS

Fifty years ago, in the old coaching days, when the only Flying Dutchman that had yet been heard of was the phantom ship of Vanderdecken, the traveller from Bristol city found his way westward by a road that ran through the very heart of Mendip. And as his steeds toiled slowly up the pass that leads into the hills, he had leisure to note upon the northern limit of the range, crowning a hill that rises steeply from the Vale of Wrington, the ramparts of an ancient camp.

There are no coaches now upon that well-kept road. Silence has settled on its wayside inns. The Flying Dutchman of our time passes the hills so far to westward that from its flying cars the camp is hardly seen.

The Mendips are rich in such memorials of the past. The whole county, indeed, abounds in points of interest to the historian and the antiquary. The dykes of Sedgemoor played a part in "the last battle worthy of the name fought on English ground." From the keep of Taunton Blake replied to Goring that he would eat his boots before he gave up his hold upon the castle. In Somerton King John of France spent a part of his captivity. The marshes of Athelney gave Alfred breathing space before that day of reckoning when his fierce antagonist was humbled on the hills of Ethandune. The noble fragments of ruin in the Isle of Avalon recall the fame of the proudest of English abbeys, ruled by Dunstan, and dowered by King Ina. And from still farther back, through the dim haze of old tradition, loom the grand figures of Arthur and his knights, "magnified by the purple mist, the dusk of centuries and of song."

The Mendips formed in early ages a well-marked border line. They were the frontier that parted the western Gael and the Belgic invader; and when in later days the Saxon conqueror Ceawlin pushed his way westward over the Wansdyke, the barrier wall of Mendip formed the farthest limit of his conquests. Massive leaden ingots, too, have been found among the hills, whose imperial stamps show plainly how early in their occupation the Romans laid hands upon the mines of Somerset.

Thus is it that on each commanding hill are the ramparts of some stronghold of British, Roman, Saxon, or even Danish handiwork; and on all Mendip, with the exception possibly of Weston Hill, no fort was better guarded than this camp of Dolbury. Its site was singularly strong, and the elaborate nature of its defences shows the importance attached to it by its builders. The ancient way, winding gently upward from the valley, and entering the fortress at its western end, is commanded by a triple row of mounds and ditches. There is a double line of earthworks along three sides of the hill-top. On the south the camp is bounded by a ravine so steep that the defences in that direction consist merely of a single rampart with a broad terrace like a road carried outside it along the brink of the descent. The eastern end, which from the level nature of the ground beyond is especially open to assault, is further supported by an outwork, and is, like the northern front, guarded by defences of great height and strength. The northern rampart is still nearly twenty-five feet high, and, in addition to the mingled stones and earth of its main portion, was strengthened by a rude unmortared wall, which, although now a heap of ruin, shows clear traces of its original construction. The ramparts are little short of a mile in circuit, and enclose an area of more than twenty acres.

Standing on the highest ground within the walls, near the massive ruins of a keeper's cottage, it is easy to see how well the camp is placed for purposes of outlook and defence. The eastern view is bounded at no great distance by the higher elevation of Black Down, beyond whose bare brown slopes extends, to the far end of the hills, an upland broken only by Cheddar gorge and the rocky glen of Ebbor. On the northward lies the Vale of Wrington, with its rich meadows, white-walled villages, and stately elms. At the foot of the far slope is the hamlet of Wrington, where Locke was born, and whose churchyard holds the dust of Hannah More.

Among the churches of Somerset are found masterpieces of the Perpendicular style. Wrington is the noblest of them all, and from that grey shaft, hardly seen against the hill, were taken the proportions of the Victoria Tower at Westminster.

To the west the wide plain stretches along the bases of the hills to the far sea, above whose brown flood rise the faint outlines of the hills of Wales. On that side, too, lies the great Mendip valley, with its scattered hamlets, a glimpse of sea again, and the blue heights of Exmoor. No more commanding point could have been chosen. The forts of Brean and Uphill, Bleadon, Worlebury, and Banwell are all in view. The movements of a hostile force could be seen at any point, even to the putting in of a war-galley at the harbour of the Axe.

Record and tradition throw but little light on the builders or the history of this great encampment. From beneath its smooth and springy turf have been recovered few traces of its old inhabitants.

Its irregular outline and elaborate defences point to a period far remote, though it is likely enough that Briton and Roman, Dane and Saxon may each have held it in his turn.

From local tradition there is little to be gleaned. In the neighbouring villages the hill is called "The Roman Camp." One patriarch of the hamlet lying nestled in the gorge below the entrance remembers to have heard his father speak of a story handed down about "The Redshanks" who lived upon the hill. It has been conjectured that these were Danes, whose primitive costume may have earned them such a title.

In Leland's "Itinerary," compiled about 1540, occurs the following passage: "There is upon the Tope of one of Mendipe Hills a Place encampyd caulyd Dolbyri, famous to the People, thus saynge:

> "'If Dolbyri dyggyd ware
> Of Golde should be the share.'"

This may refer to legendary money-hoards concealed upon the hill, or may point to quite another page of its history. The lead mines of Charterhouse lay four miles to the eastward. The road by which the metal was carried to the sea passed, it is true, a mile to the south of Dolbury, but it is not impossible that the fortress may have been a place of store for the leaden ingots.

Roman coins are said to have been found here, but these are met with far and wide among the hills, and are, after all, no definite proof of Roman occupation.

The discovery of Saxon coins and weapons is alluded to by earlier writers, but these, if not entirely lost, are scattered now in unknown hands.

The ancient Britons have left but scanty traces anywhere from which we may judge of their manners and their way of life. In their burial mounds we find little more than implements and weapons, pottery and barbaric ornaments. There are none of those minute and graphic records which enable us to read so well the story of the Roman conquest of our island.

The Roman, indeed, wrote his history as he marched along, and carved, in letters that have outlived the ravages of time, stories of triumph, the numbers of legions, and the titles of commanders. He has left on record such details even as the building of a dyke along the Severn, and the slaughter of a boar that had long been the terror of the neighbourhood.

No ancient British inscription of a date prior to the Roman conquest has survived. Even the coinage bore no lettering before the time of Cæsar. Some tribal kings later on, known to us through Latin writers, added to the rude devices on their coins a few letters of their names. After the conquest under Claudius, the native coinage appears to have ceased, and until the time of Carausius, A.D. 288, all money for circulation in the island was struck in Italy or Gaul.

The currency of the Britons was copied in the first place from the coins of Macedon, rendered familiar possibly by Greek or Phœnician traders. But in native hands the horses on the didrachma lost by degrees their original form, and degenerated finally into a mere cross. A fine British coin found at Churchill, a little to the west of the encampment, is clearly copied from a Macedonian stater. It is of gold, rather less in diameter than a sovereign, but of greater thickness.

Such treasures, alas! are rare. More numerous are the relics associated with the burial of the dead. Many barrows have been opened on various points of Mendip. Some of those examined by Skinner early in the century contained nothing more than a few handfuls of bones and charcoal. In others were discovered weapons and pottery, beads of glass and amber. Under a large inverted urn in a burial mound at Priddy the explorer relates that he found an arrowhead of bronze, still "sharp enough to mend a pen."

Little is known of discoveries within the camp itself. Rabbits sometimes bring to light pieces of dark grey pottery, and not long since, on digging at various points within the ramparts, the writer turned up many fragments of rudely decorated urns, some quartz pebbles, intended possibly for slinging, and a few flint arrowheads of primitive design.

NASEBY FIELD

I.—THE PLACE OF BATTLE

THE field of Naseby, high up among the hills of Northampton, lies in the very heart of England, as befits the spot where a Monarch fought a last battle for his crown. For nearly two centuries after the fight the ground was still in greater part unfenced, untilled. Seventy years ago no hedgerows crossed its grassy slopes. Within the memory of men still living the scene of conflict remained much in the same condition as when Roundhead and Cavalier met upon that moorland battle-ground.

But the plough has done its work upon the field since then. Gone are the thickets of gorse and the treacherous rabbit-holes that hampered on that memorable day the movements of the cavalry. The labourer's spade has drained and filled the "pits off water and other peeces off ditches" that checked the Roundhead charge. A group of farm buildings stands, perhaps on the very spot, where, when all was lost, the last regiment of Royalist infantry faced "like a wall of brasse" the torrent of victorious Ironsides. "Prince Rupert's Lodge" looks down the slope where he led his gallant Cavaliers. The only part of the field which is said to have escaped the plough is the rank pasture of The Doctor's Meadow, where, when the fight was over, the bodies of the slain were heaped into unhonoured graves. Here the ground has sunk in long, deep hollows, where in winter, water still collects in pools, though all have in modern times been partially filled up.

It is hardly likely that the ancient hawthorns standing in the meadow, are really old enough to have been under fire on the day of Naseby fight; and it is probable that the only feature of the battle-ground which remains unchanged is the "double hedge" that parts the adjacent manors of Sulby and Naseby. So huge are the blackthorn stems of its broad thickets, that it needs no effort of imagination to believe that it was from the cover of these very boughs that Okey's dismounted troopers took toll with their carbines as Prince Rupert passed.

Carlyle, describing Naseby as he saw it half a hundred years back, calls it a "peaceable old hamlet of some eight hundred souls; clay cottages for the labourers, but neatly thatched and swept." The mud cabins of those days, in some of which the sleeping room was entered by a ladder from without, have given place to cottages of trim red brick. On the tower of the church, in whose shadow lies the dust of Roundhead captains who perished in the fight, there stood in Carlyle's time, too, "a strange old ball; a hollow copper ball," which in 1544 was brought to England among the plunder of Boulogne. But the old tower has been rebuilt, and the trophy shines no longer on its summit.

On the eve of Naseby fight, at the time when their cause was on the very brink of ruin, the hopes of the Cavaliers were high. Never, as is well remarked by Gardiner, had the triumph of the King seemed nearer than at the hour when he was marching to his doom. The great Montrose was in the full career of victory. He had sent word from Scotland that having shortly, as he hoped, reduced that country to obedience, he would come to the assistance of his Royal Master "with a brave army which, backed by the justice of your Majesty's cause, will make the rebels in England as well as in Scotland feel the just rewards of rebellion." He saw in fancy Scotland at his feet. He had indeed scattered the Covenanters at Tippermuir, and routed Burleigh by the walls of Aberdeen. With his handful of Highlanders he had broken at Inverlochy the power of the Clan Campbell. Since then he had conducted from Dundee a retreat that in the eyes of foreign captains was an achievement more brilliant even than his victories, and now came news of another splendid triumph at Auldearne. Charles himself, after a three days' siege, had taken Leicester by a midnight assault. The army of Fairfax was held idle by the resolute defence of Oxford.

Fortune indeed seemed smiling on the Royal cause. But it was no more than seeming. The knowledge that the King was treating for the help of foreign mercenaries had roused against him a still more bitter feeling through the country. Gerard was in Wales, unable to come to his support. Goring, whose help the King was calling for in vain, still loitered idly in the west. The repulse of Fairfax and the raising of the siege of Oxford proved a hollow triumph, for the main army of the New Model was thus set free for more aggressive action. Fairfax resolved to attack the King without delay. All available forces were summoned to his standard. Cromwell, to the delight of the army, was made lieutenant-general, with command of the cavalry.

Charles for his part was wholly unaware of the movements of his opponents; but he and his commanders regarded the "New Noddle" with supreme contempt. So ill-informed or careless were the Royal officers that the Parliamentary army was within eight miles of the camp at Daventry before word was brought of their advance. By the next evening the Royalist troops had marched to Harborough, while the King himself had quarters in the old hall at Lubenham, a couple of miles to the westward.

He was roused from his rest that night by the news that Fairfax was at hand, and that Ireton had galloped in the twilight into Naseby village and had captured nearly the whole of the Royal outpost stationed there while the careless Cavaliers were playing quoits or drinking in the little hostelry. The hostelry itself has been rebuilt; but "Cromwell's table"—a ponderous board of black oak, said to be the very one round which Prince Rupert's lifeguards were carousing—is among the few remaining relics of the time, though it is no longer in the village. Before the morning broke the King was back in Harborough, in council with his captains. The decision was, as Clarendon expresses it, "to fight, to which there was always an immoderate appetite."

The march began. By five o'clock Astley had ranged the line of battle in a strong position on a hill two miles from Harborough. There the Royalist army waited long, while Fairfax, who had left his camp at three, had ample leisure to choose his fighting ground near Naseby village.

"About eight of the clock it began to be doubted whether the intelligence they had received of the enemy was true." Rupert himself rode on to reconnoitre, and catching sight of the despised New Model in full retreat, as he thought, the fiery captain sent back word to come on with all speed.

"Hereupon the advantage ground was quitted, and the excellent order they were in," and the Royalist forces pushed in pursuit as they supposed of a retiring enemy, with such haste that the battle had begun before all the artillery was on the field.

Fairfax meanwhile had no intention of retreating. He was but improving an already excellent position. A mile to the south of Naseby the long ridge of Mill Hill runs east and west along the edge of the battlefield. Here, on the slope, Skippon arranged the Parliamentary forces, withdrawing them "about a hundred paces" further up the hill, on the advice of Fairfax, in order to give them more advantage in the charge, and, by retiring them behind the ridge, to screen their numbers and position from the eyes of the Royalists.

The army of the King was drawn up finally on Dust Hill, facing the Parliamentary line at the distance of rather more than a mile. The slopes of the two hills and the hollow of Broad Moor, lying between, formed the narrow limits of the battlefield. The blackthorn hedge, behind whose cover lay concealed a thousand dismounted Parliamentary dragoons, was on the extreme of the Royalist right, connecting the two positions; so that, as they followed Rupert in the charge, the Cavaliers must pass the entire length of its galling fire.

It has not been always fully recognised that the Royalist force at Naseby was far outnumbered. It is only since the evidence has been so carefully weighed by Colonel Ross and Dr. Gardiner that the disparity has been clearly understood. The statements of Parliamentary writers—naturally anxious to make the most of their victory—that the numbers were evenly balanced, have long been accepted without question. But modern research has made it clear that, while 14,000 men of the New Model followed Fairfax to the field, the Cavaliers went into action not 8000 strong—"a body not sufficient," as Clarendon observes, "to fight a battle for a crown."

NASEBY FIELD

II.—FIGHTING FOR THE CROWN

THE armies who faced each other across Naseby Field were eager for the battle, though they little guessed how much was hanging on the issue of the fight. "Both sides with mighty shouts expressed a hearty desire of fighting," says a Roundhead writer, "having for our parts recommended our cause to God's protection, and received the word, which was 'God our Strength'; theirs, 'Queen Mary.'" Not a man there was in a mood to draw back. The Cavaliers were eager to make short work of the New Model; as to which indeed we have the testimony of the time, that "never hardly did any army go forth to war who had less of the confidence of their own friends, or were more the objects of contempt of their enemies."

Cromwell, on the other hand, has left on record that he felt confident of victory. The Cavaliers were already moving forward, when the artillery of Fairfax opened fire on their advancing line. The first shock of battle was on the Royal right. Ireton's troopers, on the Parliamentary left, came on with a front less well-ordered than their opponents, and a flank movement in aid of Skippon's infantry, hard-pressed already by the Royalist foot, had begun further to disorder their formation, when Rupert's trumpets sounded for the charge. Seizing the happy moment for his favourite stroke, the Cavalier captain launched his whole wing against the Roundhead left. Down the hill they went—the flower of the royal army, high-born Cavaliers, who had followed their bold chief through many a desperate fray—across the swampy hollow, up the hill-slope in front, at Ireton's wavering line. The Roundhead troopers were scattered like chaff by the whirlwind of the Royal cavalry. Ireton himself was down, wounded, and a prisoner. "Six pieces of the Rebels best cannon" were in the hands of the Cavaliers. On swept the eager horsemen, driving the Parliamentary cavalry almost to the skirts of Naseby village. But the baggage-guard in Ireton's rear met Rupert's summons to surrender with defiance and a volley.

With his well appointed squadrons, flushed with victory, the prince might doubtless have easily enforced his challenge. But a glance at the battle now raging in the hollow warned him it was time he should return. Langdale's cavalry on the left had advanced meanwhile, with hardly less valour than the followers of Rupert. But the slope was against them, and the nature of the ground. They were outnumbered by the enemy. That enemy was led by no less skilled an officer of cavalry than Cromwell himself. The Ironsides came on at the charge. Langdale's men made a desperate fight of it. Victory did not come easily even to Cromwell. At first, indeed, the Royalists had the best of the struggle. "The divisions off the left hand off the right (Parliamentary) wing were overborne, having much disadvantage by reason off pits off water and other peeces off ditches, that they expected not, which hindered them in their order to charge." But Cromwell, taking Langdale's men in front and flank, forced them down the hill: and in the end the whole of the Royal left was driven back a quarter of a mile beyond the infantry, which was thus left unsupported. "Pressed hard," says Clarendon, "before they could get to the top of the hill, they gave back, and fled farther and faster than became them. Four of the enemies bodies, close, and in good order, followed them that they might not rally—which they never thought of doing." Thus holding Langdale back with a strong force of cavalry, Cromwell hastened, with the rest of his command, to the aid of the infantry in the centre. Here the fight was going well for the king. The Royalist foot had not only held their ground against a force twice as numerous as their own, but were having all the best of the battle. We have the witness of a Parliamentary writer, who was on the field, that although the Roundhead infantry on the right, "stood, being not much pressed," yet that "almost all the main battel, being over-pressed, gave ground and went off in some disorder."

The pikemen of Skippon and Fairfax already outnumbered the royal infantry by two to one. The appearance of Cromwell on the scene threw a still greater weight into the scale. Many of Ireton's men would by this time have rallied. Okey's dragoons were no longer wanted on the far side of Sulby hedge. The only wonder is that the Royal infantry should have held their ground so long. But the end, though delayed, could not be distant. The odds began to tell. It was long, indeed, before resistance ceased. We have Cromwell's own words in his despatch, "We, after three hours' fight, very doubtful, at last routed his Army." The doomed battalions, outnumbered, hard beset in front, and flank, and rear, fought on with desperate valour, until, disheartened by an unexpected charge, most of them gave up the hopeless contest, threw down their arms and asked for quarter. One regiment alone, refusing every summons to surrender, stood "like a wall of brasse" against the swarm of cavalry. "Has this regiment been charged?" asked Fairfax of his colonel of the guard. "Twice," was the reply, "but they moved not an inch." Ordering his officer to attack the stubborn foe in front, Fairfax himself, who had lost his helmet in the fight led the charge against their rear. Valour could achieve no more. The ranks were broken, the last stand was over.

The King, meanwhile, had seen their dire extremity. His reserve of guards—"very resolute troops, and the best horse in the army"—still remained intact. A considerable force of cavalry had rallied to his standard. He called on them to follow to the support of his heroic pikemen. "One charge more, gentlemen, and we recover the day." But an officer riding at his side laid hand on the Royal bridle rein. "Sire," said he, "will you go upon your death?" As he turned the king's charger aside, the movement was mistaken by the troops for a signal to retire. Panic seized the men. They "turned and rode upon the spur as if they were every man to shift for himself. It is very true that upon the more souldierly word *stand*, which was sent after them, many of them returned to the king, though the former unlucky word carried more from him." The fighting ceased with the rout of the last regiment of foot.

Rupert returned from his victorious pursuit too late to be of service to his master. No efforts now could restore order to the scattered troops. The day was lost. The wreck of the royal army galloped from the field. Down the long slope from Naseby swept the Roundheads in pursuit. A party of fugitives, caught in a *cul de sac* near the village church of Marston, were cut to pieces to a man. Through the streets of Market Harborough thundered the shouting chase. Far across the open country, almost to the walls of Leicester, followed the victorious Ironsides. Of the Royal cavalry, perhaps two thousand got away. Of the bold infantry that before the dawn had marched up from Harborough along the green Northamptonshire lanes, hardly a hundred escaped. A Roundhead colonel of dragoons declared, that only two footmen reached the gates of Leicester. Five thousand prisoners, all the guns, the royal standard, and a hundred colours were among the fruits of victory.

Never indeed was triumph more complete. But a blow, far greater even than the destruction of his army, was the capture of the king's cabinet, and the subsequent publication of the letters it contained. With bitter wrath men learned how the Duke of Lorraine had promised to lend the king a thousand mercenaries; how the Papists were to be bribed to take arms against the Parliament. "I give thee power," so ran one of the letters to the queen, "in my name, that I will take away all the Penal Laws against the Roman Catholics in England . . . . so as by their Means . . . . I may have so powerful Assistance as may deserve so great a Favour."

The first despatch was dated from the field: "Our horse are still in pursuit, and have taken many officers; their standard is ours, the King's Waggon and many ladyes. God Almighty give us thankful hearts for this great victory, the most absolute yet obtayned. The General, Lieut. Gen. Cromwell, and Major Gen. Skippon did, beyond expression, gallantly; so did all the other commanders and soldiers; we have lost but two captains. Naezby, where this fight was, this Saturday, 14 Junii, 1645." Cromwell's despatch to Lenthall was sent from Harborough, Fairfax adding an ominous postscript: "Some Irish are among the prisoners . . . . I desire they may be proceeded against according to ordinance of Parliament." What that ordinance was we learn from the records. No quarter was to be given to any Irish who might be taken with arms in their hands. The Speaker received the news the same night, and two days later it was resolved by Parliament that "the messenger that brought the good news from Sir Thomas Fairfax, shall have forty pounds bestowed upon him." And further, that there should be at once provided "a jewel of five hundred pounds value to be sent from this house to Sir Thomas Fairfax, as a testimony of their affections to him and of the esteem they have of his services."

It is hardly half a century since the scene of the battle was identified. So little, indeed, was known, that Carlyle and Arnold fixed on a spot a mile the other side of Naseby village, where the obelisk to commemorate the fight had been set up some years before. But excavations, afterwards undertaken in the Doctor's Meadow at Carlyle's request, showed beyond doubt, that there the bodies of the slain were buried. Among the black earth of the hollows—once mounds where the dead were heaped by hundreds, and hardly hidden with a scanty covering of soil—were found fragments of many skeletons, with here and there a rusted weapon, a sword hilt or a broken rapier. Few relics of the fight are left. In the cornlands, that cross now the place of battle, musket and pistol balls, white with the rust of centuries, still clash at times upon the plough. In a water-course on Broadmoor was found, not long ago, a heavy drinking flask of metal, which doubtless had lain there undisturbed since some trooper, for the last time perhaps, slaked his battle-thirst beside the stream. Ten years ago, or rather more, was found a ring set with a single sapphire. More recently another ring was picked up, by a boy while ploughing, on the spot where the Cavaliers of Langdale gave way before the onset of the Ironsides. Within its plain, broad band of gold was engraved the legend

BE . FAITHFVL . VNTO . DEATH,

words, doubtless, that some high-born lady had whispered in her lover's ear, to be the lode-star of his life—whose echo, it may be, was still, on that fatal morning, sounding in his ears, above the roar of Roundhead guns with call more clear than rallying trumpet. A thousand cavaliers that day proved with their blood that they were "faithful unto death," and somewhere in the Doctor's Meadow his bones have long since mouldered in a common grave. "What matter? Were he any better lapped in lead under a marble monument, side by side with his knightly ancestors in the old church at home, than lying here under the wide changing sky, to rot, a nameless skeleton, on Naseby Field?"

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